



# Positive Psychologists

on

# Positive Psychology

*Volume 3*

Jane Dutton

Margaret Kern

Sarah Pressman

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Lea Waters

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Suzy Green

Laura Morgan Roberts

Michelle McQuaid

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*Edited by Aaron Jarden, Gavin Slemp, Austin Chia,  
Emilia Lahti & Eunbit Hwang*

## Dedications

### Aaron Jarden

- To all the women enabling the field of positive psychology to flourish. You know who you are... keep going!

### Gavin Slempp

- It was both a pleasure and a privilege to be involved in this project. To work with this wonderful team and to interview such fascinating people was a truly great experience. I'd like to extend a warm thank you to the rest of the editorial team, led by Aaron, and to all of the interviewees – you are an inspiration!

### Austin Chia

- To the inspiring women of positive psychology and the affirmative sciences, may this book serve as a modest expression of our gratitude for your contributions.

### Emilia Lahti

- The future is always first an idea. May this book inspire, elevate and empower the current and future generation of researchers and practitioners within psychology, as well as academics in general. I dedicate this book to female researchers (and people representing minority groups within science) who have blazed new trails, often against slim odds, and cleared a path for others to follow. These brave people of *sisu*, the Finnish word for extraordinary courage, have my utmost respect and admiration.

### Eunbit Hwang

- To all the women who feel “called” to make the world flourish. And to my dear mom Sun Hwa Kim, my source of positive inspiration.

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## Introduction

Interest in positive psychology is rapidly expanding as the field continues to make swift progress in terms of scientific advancement and understanding. There are more courses, more workshops, more conferences, more students, more associations, more journals and more textbooks than ever before. The news media and public are thirsty for information related to happiness, and, specifically, wellbeing, and for all facets of positive psychology generally. Psychology departments are increasingly looking to teach courses and offer qualifications that focus specifically on positive psychology, and various organisations are trying to understand how they can best capitalise on and harness the field's initial scientific findings.

What you don't hear so much about is how positive psychology operates in the real world, how researchers and practitioners became interested in positive psychology, how they work with clients and the various models and theories they use. What do they find most useful? What happens to their thinking and practice as they become experienced and knowledgeable in the positive psychology arena? Why did they decide to move into positive psychology? What do they get out of being involved in the positive psychology community? What directions are they and the field heading towards? Is gender an issue for this developing field?

This book discusses these kinds of questions and issues, and is a book for all those in the wellbeing, helping professional and psychological fields interested in knowing more about the development, theory, research and application of the new field of positive psychology. It is a book that spans an eclectic range of interests from psychology students to psychologists, to coaches, to media and beyond.

In the following chapters, seventeen accomplished female researchers within the field of positive psychology (as well as other areas that overlap with it) share their ideas, thoughts and experiences, while giving the reader a chance to learn about the path that led them to where they are today. In this third book of the series we chose to highlight female voices within academia and practice because of the unique challenges faced by women in science. "Talent is universal, opportunity is not," as the old adage goes. We hope to see a world where more people are able to pursue their passions with equal

opportunity regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. This is not only good from a human rights standpoint, but also for the development of science in general. If we wish to expand scientific understanding, we would benefit from an approach that includes a far more diverse spectrum of humanity. Although female scientists continue to be underrepresented and face obstacles in achieving equal recognition and pay for their work, the number of women embarking on science careers has been increasing steadily over the past several decades – partly thanks to having had role models and mentors whose career trajectories they could seek to emulate.

Seventeen interviews is obviously too small a number to arrive at any generalisation. This book is not research *per se*; it is exploratory in nature and should be consumed in that light. Placement and order of each interview is random rather than sequential, meaning that they may be read in any order. Both US English and Commonwealth English are used. All interviews were conducted October to December 2015 and thus reflect thinking at that time. Before publication, all interviewees approved their transcripts as being accurate (further editing and proofing changes to the text were made after these approvals for which the editors are responsible for any grammatical or formatting errors).

Our sincere thanks and gratitude to the giants of this field, and to the up-and-coming stars for passing on their wisdom and knowledge. We hope this book may be useful to those wanting to know more about what positive psychology is, how it developed, where it is going, how it is going to get there, and to those looking to move into the positive psychology arena. In short, we hope these interviews are engaging and provide further insight into this new and rapidly developing field, and that it enriches your understanding of positive psychology as it currently stands.

## The 3rd Volume

The first volume of *Positive Psychologists on Positive Psychology* (2012, ASIN: B007IXU1RY, ISBN: 978-0-473-20944-5) was a huge success by any reasonable standard: the complete book was downloaded some 10,000 times, individual interviews downloaded some additional 20,000 times, and the demand meant it was also translated into Spanish and Chinese. Reviews by respected experts (Margarita Tarragona and Bridget Grenville-Cleave) were very positive (i.e., the book was described as “Original, engaging and enjoyable”). With such data and feedback, we saw very little reason to change the formula for the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, and likewise, the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume (2013, ISBN: 978-0-473-26661-5) was similarly well read. Whilst the first volume was compiled of interviews from people from the United States, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and, as such, largely represented a traditional Western perspective, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume we intentionally included more diversity and breadth by including more European and Eastern researchers and practitioners; the aim was specifically to go beyond the Western perspective. Thus, while not all of the interviewees in the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume are easily recognisable, their personal insights certainly enriched our understanding of positive psychology as it stood globally.

Following on from this themed focus, this 3<sup>rd</sup> volume focuses on women in positive psychology, and additionally investigates gender issues from the interviewees’ perspective. Notably, the previous two volumes of this book series had already interviewed some female legends in the field – such as in the first volume: Barbara Fredrickson, Sonja Lyubomirsky, Acacia Parks, Ilona Boniwell and Denise Quinlan, and in the second volume: Angela Duckworth, Margarita Tarragona, Dianne Vella-Brodrick, Dafne Cataluña and María Dolores Avia. The interviews in this 3<sup>rd</sup> volume add to their voices. The 3<sup>rd</sup> volume was also compiled by five interviewers (Aaron, Gavin, Austin, Emilia and Eunbit) in order to make this more global reach possible, and to allow for the book to be translated into various languages on completion. Enjoy!

## Jane Dutton

Jane Dutton is the Robert L. Kahn Distinguished University Professor of Business Administration and Psychology at the University of Michigan, Ross School of Business. Her research focuses on how organizational conditions strengthen capabilities of individuals and firms. In particular, she examines how high-quality connections, positive meaning and emotions contribute to individual and organizational strengths. Her research has explored compassion and organizations, resilience and organizations, as well as energy and organizations. This research stream is part of Positive Organizational Scholarship, a sub-field of management and organizations that Jane, along with Bob Quinn and Kim Cameron, established in 2001. In 2002, they founded the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship, now known as the Center for Positive Organizations. Her past research has explored processes of organizational adaptation, focusing on how strategic issues are interpreted and managed in organizations, as well as issues of organizational identity and change.

**In general terms and from your point of view, what are some of the defining features of positive psychology applied to work organizations or what is called Positive Organizational Scholarship or positive organizational psychology?**

This is a great question to start out with. I think of this domain as about how contextual features of organizations shape or affect individual and team flourishing. An organizational perspective highlights the organizational context, and by context I mean things like organizational structure, organizational practices, organizational processes; and the perspective works to assess how these features really matter in fostering or inhibiting optimal human functioning or flourishing at work. Another defining feature of an organization lens on positive psychology is that it encourages thinking about multiple levels of analysis, so you're not just looking at individual flourishing but you're also considering dyadic flourishing, team flourishing, unit flourishing as well as whole organizational flourishing. The breadth of focus can be overwhelming because of the multiplicity of both contextual features to consider but also different levels of analysis.

**Do you have suggestions or tips for when it becomes that kind of overwhelming “where do I start, at which level” kind of thing? It’s pretty complex, these systems and how they interact, so how and where do you start, or is every organization different?**

You mean if I was a researcher or practitioner thinking about this, where do I start?

**Yes.**

I have a bias and I’ll preface it by saying that I sit in both the psychology department and in the business school, and I really believe that the world desperately needs change and improvement. I don’t think that we can get there one individual at a time. I think we need to understand how to create collective conditions that foster changes or improvements in flourishing at these different levels. So let’s start with the hard question of, “How does context matter?” Because in order to create capacities and capabilities that come from flourishing at the rate we need them, in order to tackle some of these basic questions like: How do you improve people’s experiences at work? How do you improve students’ experiences at school? How do you improve the government’s functioning in ways that call forth the best of governmental institutions? We have to understand how to do this at scale or at a more collective level. So I say: let’s start with what I think is really hard, but I think has the biggest pay-off to society, and that’s understanding how conditions that affect multiple individuals at the same time can be structured or altered in some way that call forth the conditions which produce flourishing. Does that make sense?

**Absolutely. I really like the way you put that too: “the collective conditions which can foster” or these kinds of enabling conditions that you’re suggesting. And I guess that there are various people in the positive psychology community who have been harping on for many years now about the importance of context and moving beyond the individual, people like Robert Biswas-Diner and Todd Kashdan, but I feel unfortunately like a lot of their messaging of that particular point has not really been picked up by the community fully, so to hear you say it, I certainly agree. I do research and work under a professor of public health who realizes that organizations are one of the key delivery mechanisms for disseminating public health messages and this kind of knowledge and practice.**

They institutionalize it, so I think understanding how new structures and processes get built, but also how do you maintain them, and how do you change them? Those are questions that really are oftentimes better answered by our friends in sociology or our friends in political science or public policy.

Psychology alone can't tackle it. I really do feel a sense of deep urgency about this in that we need new forms of collaboration between psychology and other social sciences to really deliver on the promise.

**The key guy leading this, at least from my perspective, is Ed Diener. He has done and is doing great work in collaborating with economists and sociologists and public policy people and philosophers, and, really, the interdisciplinary reach of the stuff he's doing now and his track record of getting people who are doing similar sorts of things but using different types of language on the same page and connected is really impressive to watch. We need a lot more of that.**

It's hard work. Really hard work. It makes my head hurt.

**Yip, ok, next question. When and why did Positive Organizational Scholarship arise?**

The thing that is so interesting to me is these movements, or changes in perspective, happened in multiple social sciences at the same time, so positive psychology has actually been the most effective at getting the message out there. I think the leadership in positive psychology has been really smart, thinking about involving a lot of different people at key stages in their careers at a time when they could really add a lot of value. But this shift toward understanding what are the conditions that enable the good, as opposed to conditions "the bad" that was happening in multiple places. For example, in political science they were starting to get away from thinking about how to resolve conflict to more about: how do you produce peace? In our field, in organizational studies, there was discontent and a pushing-out of the boundaries of organizational research to consider things like forgiveness and compassion at the institutional level at about the same time that positive psychology was arising. But they were disorganized, kind of popping up, emerging; I would say corrective or expansions of what was being studied in organizational studies. Organizational researchers did not have an overlying framework, or a common way of talking about this shift in perspective.

I think some things catalyzed for us simply because we were at Michigan, where several of us working on some of these more "positive" perspectives on organizations happened to be at the same university. I went to one of the first conferences, at Akumal, in Mexico, as part of a "positive work pod" that Marty [Seligman] had assigned to a former student of mine, Amy Wrzesniewski, to lead. Luckily she invited me to this event. It's funny because I knew Barb Fredrickson as a friend, not as a researcher, and Barb

and Chris Peterson were at the conference in Akumal. I don't know how to describe it but, I literally had an "on your knees" kind of moment listening to them talk, such wonderful people, and thinking, as an organizational researcher, again, the same idea: if we can lasso some of these ideas and processes and multiply them by understanding how organizational structures and practices could make this happen faster and better, then this could be really helpful. So we happened to be there at the same time. When we all got back to Michigan we said, "Let's have coffee and connect and talk". At the time I was doing this work on compassion that was unrelated to anybody in my field. Another one of my colleagues at Michigan, Kim Cameron, was doing research on organizational forgiveness, which, like compassion, was considered "way out there". Organizational forgiveness was not individual forgiveness.

We had this lunch in about May of 2001 and decided that we would have a conference in November of 2001. We invited a bunch of organizational researchers who we thought might be open to this, as well as Barb [Fredrickson] and Chris [Peterson] and a couple of other key positive psychologists, and then of course 9/11 happened. Now, I'm telling you my story on this so this is a bit self-centered but this is how, for me, Positive Organizational Scholarship was launched. I'll tell you the background. So on that day, 9/11, I was supposed to give my first talk in the business school on compassion, and I remember that I didn't sleep the whole night because I was nervous about what people would think about this researcher in a business school talking about compassion. I didn't give my talk because it was cancelled, and our dean (we had a brand new dean) learned I was doing work on compassion, and so he asked me to create a memo so he could talk to his team the next morning about what the business school should do in the wake of this trauma. I did create a memo with the help of my Compassionlab research team and I got tons of feedback from the dean. And the alumni shared the memo with that perspective, about how do you lead to unlock capability and capacity in a time of trauma? It was really useful. So I thought, "Oh my gosh, you think what I have to say is useful". And I also thought: all these people involved in positive psychology and positive organizational work that we have invited to this conference, they all have something useful to say too.

At the time it was seen as radical, so we created this website called Leading and Trying Times [see <http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/essays/>], and we invited everyone coming to this conference including Chris and Barb and Marty and a bunch of different people to write a memo to leaders based on their research on what they should do to cultivate the good in the context of something that was really traumatic. At that time we got so much feedback (we got something like 20,000 hits on our

website in the month of October 2001), that said this approach to organizations and leadership, that we were just going to work on at our first Positive Organizational Scholarship conference in November, was actually meaningful to people. We learned that this message speaks to people. This was a huge catalyst to the positive organizational perspective. It was sort of an intervention from the world that said try, it said go, go, go with speed.

So that conference generated a book and it generated six or seven workshops and small micro-communities of researchers that are still going. Again it was a confluence of different kinds of things that happened here that created momentum. There were also some people at Nebraska, Fred Luthans and a group of people there that were connected to Jim Clifton and the people at Gallup, who all started working on positive organizational behavior. So this is more evidence that there were efforts popping up to bring this positive perspective to organizational research that were taking place at different places during a similar time period that all got nourished, in part, by what we saw happening in positive psychology. Seeds were planted and they started growing. But there was some serendipity and emergence and it was not an overly rational or planned thing.

The other thing I will suggest is that there were a lot of doctoral students here at the time including Adam Grant, Ryan Quinn, Laura Morgan Roberts, Monica Worline, Scott Sonenshein, Emily Heaphy, Aran and Brianna Caza, JP Stephens and Amy Wrzesniewski, among others, who were studying topics that fit in this domain and taking academic jobs at lots of really good universities. They were having a lot of good impacts through their teaching, as well as their research; they were helping people to see how to teach leaders how to lead from a more positive perspective.

So that's a pretty self-focused account from my perspective of how this POS [positive organizational scholarship] perspective took root. I guess that's the "Jane Dutton" view of what I was able to see, of how and why this positive perspective mushroomed quickly. There are currently many faculties still interested at Michigan, and we now have a center called the Center for Positive Organizations. We are just as passionate about it now as we were then, still feeling like the promise has not been met. There is still so much work to do, but this generation of students who are coming to business schools and professional schools who want to make a difference in the world, really need theory and tools and practices about "how do you design and change organizations" so that more of this potential is realized.

**I remember at the recent World Congress on Positive Psychology in Florida (2015), the session that Meg Rao organized with you and Kim Cameron and Stuart Donaldson, I remember coming out of that thinking, “There are three people who are still really passionate about their work”. It was impressive to see. But actually, just on your previous point, I was just thinking it’s really quite interesting that balance between, when you said that the leadership in positive psychology has been quite smart in bringing in various people at various times, like keynote speakers at the IPPA conferences and so forth, bringing people from other domains and influence within psychology. So there is a bit of that, but there is also this serendipity of being in the right place at the right time that sparks something. There is this interesting tension between how the field is moving forward in a coordinated way, and a lot of it is hooking up with the right people and the right ideas and being in the right place. It’s just interesting to see that tension played out, but nonetheless...**

I think there is another really important tension, which is partly trying to work with the competing tensions of needing the ideas to be “scientifically valid,” and, on the other hand, you needing to make the work really useful and accessible so that people can take it and run. For me and for the people around me, it’s that the world is so ready for this. We don’t know what to do with the demand, and this was not true ten years ago.

**The state of the science too. We have done a lot of work on efficacy, but not too much on effectiveness, and the reason why a lot of this stuff falls over in organizations is because it does not really have that tried and true pilot testing of a real-world kind of an aspect to it just yet. So I guess it’s exciting times now where it’s moving to consider effectiveness more at this stage.**

It’s great that people like you are doing what you’re doing in terms of fostering the conversation and the cross-fertilization.

**Thanks, I guess it’s one little part of it. Let’s crack on with the next question. What are the sorts of topics and foci of this research domain of Positive Organizational Scholarship, for people reading who might not be so familiar?**

Have you seen this book [holding up a copy of The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship]? Just to give you a sense of it, I remember when I first saw the first Handbook of Positive Psychology, I couldn’t put it down. It was like, “Oh my gosh, look at all these different ways to see possibilities in positive psychology”. And this is the same thing. Just to give someone who was thinking

about it an idea, there are 79 chapters, and the kinds of categories that fall under “positive individual attributes” are topics like: work engagement, callings, positive identities, proactivity, creativity, curiosity and positive traits. The handbook includes sections on positive emotions that have five or six chapters, strengths and virtues, positive relationships, positive human resource practices, positive leadership and change, positive organizational practices, a positive lens on problems and challenges, and expanding to the new frontiers of Positive Organizational Scholarship. At this point there is a highly diverse garden of different approaches that researchers are taking to explore and study the domain of positive organizational scholarship. The quest is partly about reinventing traditional topics in management or positive organizational scholarship and then also expanding the boundaries of the field of management and organizational scholarship.

We are also looking at topics that we never thought were part of management or leadership. An example would be a focus on the topic of compassion. A POS-take on compassion would conceptualize and study this topic not as an individual or interpersonal feeling or process, but, instead, as a type of organizational strength. Such an approach would consider, “How do you think about building organizations that have a capability for fostering compassion at the collective level?” The same question could be asked for the capability for forgiveness or integrity at the collective level. So one focus that Positive Organizational Scholarship takes is investigating seriously the question of, “How do you think about these strengths and virtues as manifest as collective properties and capacities?” So that gives you a little bit of a sense of the scope of topics within the domain of Positive Organizational Scholarship. There are lots of possibilities.

**Actually just while we are talking about books, I really enjoyed the book you wrote with Gretchen Spreitzer, How to be a Positive Leader. It’s a fantastic example of a book anyone can pick up and get great value out of immediately; it’s not long-winded and overly academic. I recommend it all the time and people come back to me saying it’s fantastic.**

I’m so glad!

**The other one that sticks out to me is Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux.**

This is a strong endorsement as I have not read it yet.

**It's a long book; it's something like 400 pages, but it's case study after case study...**

I actually have it here on my desk! [holds the book up to camera].

**On his website you can actually download it and read the pdf and then subsequently pay what you think it's worth, or you can pay upfront, which I think is an interesting model. This is the best book that I read earlier this year [2015].**

Someone just told me about this book. I love it when multiple people do, who are good positive psych people, recommend something and then I usually just buy it because I want it to be part of my library. I'm always lending, and I find this stuff gives me hope. It's not just giving me ideas, it's giving me oxygen for action.

**I think you will enjoy it. Anyway, next question. Other than your research center, where are the hot spots of positive organizational work around the globe?**

It's distributed in lots of areas, but you are near Australia and I think in Australia and New Zealand there is a lot happening. I'm probably most familiar with what's happening in Melbourne [University] and what they are doing with positive education. I think they are taking an organizational lens seriously, and that's exciting to me, partly because they are implementing so many things in schools. So I feel like there are a lot of possibilities there. And Claremont, I think that they have an interesting combination of different kinds of researchers there, I think that Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio, is also an important part of this effort. David Cooperrider and Appreciative Inquiry, I think about them as having a very successful practice around organizational change. Part of what positive organizational scholarship is trying to do is provide a foundation as to why practices like Appreciative Inquiry are so powerful. What are some of the mechanisms? I think there are some people at the University of Technology at Sydney and Boston University also deeply interested in and working on POS-related topics. I really think there is not a lot of concentrated work, I guess. I really find some inspiration and some interesting writing coming out of the movement called Conscious Capitalism. I think that what Raj Sisodia is doing in conjunction with a number of CEOs is really exciting. There is another movement called humanistic management that is working more in the space of public policy and non-profits that is also in that space. Are there additional ones that I have not mentioned that strike you?

**Not really, those are the ones on my radar, especially the crew at the University of Melbourne and Lea Waters and what they doing with positive education. But you're exactly right; they have bought in Lindsay Oades from the University of Wollongong who is great with various systems and public policy, so you can see they are definitely taking a systems view with publishing... Actually I've just been invited as a visiting scholar there mid-next year (2016) for a very short period so that is going to be a lot of fun, and I'll find out in detail what they are up to. They are gearing up to push positive education further, so it's a great team and cool people involved, it's impressive.**

I love the application to education because if you are applying these kinds of ideas to business organizations you get into all kinds of debates about whether this is subordinating the real goal of business, which is to serve shareholders. However, when you are talking about schools, the stakeholders are clear; it's the kids, and it's not as debatable as to whether wellbeing is something you should care about. With business organizations, a POS perspective is more controversial, believe it or not, so I'm excited with the work that's going to happen around schools because there is clarity of purpose.

**One area I'm really becoming interested in right now is Positive Universities, although positive education really started at the high school level. I see this trend flowing into universities and there are a few folk becoming more interested in that, and lead by George Mason University, we are all going to get together in July 2016. Anyway, one last question. Who are the emerging and unknown researchers in positive organizations to look out for? You must have some people on your radar and think, "Yes, they are going to be around and do some really cool work".**

We just had a great research incubator this morning and it's the first time we skyped in Warren Nielsen, who is from the University of Cape Town in South Africa. He has been studying social purpose organizations and he is more of a sociologist than a psychologist, which is very exciting to me, because he is really interested in "How do organizations institutionalize flourishing?" He has this really powerful idea of positive institutional work, so he is interested in how organizational roles and practices help people: a collective, legitimate, positive, subjective experience of being authentically themselves, and being joyful. So in sociology, before Warren's work, the idea was that organizations institutionalized and got legitimacy through adopting certain practices and processes, like universities adopt ranking systems because those make them look legitimate. But what Warren is saying is that it's not about adopting practices, it about actually having routines in organizations where people share positive subjective experiences and make it normal to feel and talk in that way. So he has studied a bunch of

social purpose organizations and found this systematic pattern in how processes and routines legitimate positive subjective experiences. That does not sound as radical as it is, but it's really radical and powerful. So he would be someone.

I think Stephanie Creary is a young scholar at Cornell who is doing really interesting work on positive identities and diversity and inclusion. I see some really interesting things happening in the space of diversity and inclusion in organizations. There is a new book called *Positive Organizing in a Global Society*, [holds book up to camera] edited by Laura Morgan Roberts, Lynn Wooten and Martin Davidson. The book captures some of the important work going on around changing the conversation around diversity and being informed by a more positive perspective. Next I would mention Reut Livne-Tarandach, who is looking at the process of regeneration – a little bit different from resilience – but how organizations “come back to life” from various situations. I think her work is interesting and important. I'm also going to mention my colleague Dave Mayer, who has been studying positive ethics. So much of ethics is focused on preventing the unethical rather than promoting the ethical.

The last person is Scott Sonenshein, who is at Rice University, and I think there is a lot being done in the domain of social change: “What are positive perspectives on organizational and social change?” Scott, along with Monica Worline and Martha Feldman, is developing new theories and tackling the question of, “How do you cultivate resourcefulness in and of organizations?” “How do you organize around creating more resources from within or expanding the capacity of resources?” So I think these kinds of question are really interesting and important for answering questions around organizational flourishing.

**I guess we are doing something similar to that. Our answer is that you just take away most of the rules in an organisation and they become more creative and innovative, I mean you manage the risk, but nonetheless... Jane, this was just such a great interview, so much rich content, we really appreciate your time and wisdom!**

I really appreciate you asking and including me, and doing the work that you're doing, I think it's really important!

## Margaret (Peggy) Kern

Peggy Kern is a senior lecturer at the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education. She received her undergraduate degree in psychology from Arizona State University, a master's and PhD in social / personality psychology from the University of California (UC), Riverside, and was a postdoctoral fellow for four years at the Positive Psychology Centre at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn). Her research examines the question of who flourishes in life (physically, mentally and socially), why, and what enhances or hinders healthy life trajectories. Her studies include wellbeing measurement, big data approaches to psychological study and long data approaches for testing sophisticated theories of psychosocial processes underlying health and wellbeing over time.

### **Can you tell our readers a bit about how you became interested in positive psychology?**

I feel like I've ended up in the field without really choosing it – perhaps it has chosen me. I started my undergrad as an early education major. Partway through, I think I needed a bit more of an intellectual challenge, so I changed my major a few times and finally ended up in psychology. And then I decided I really liked health psychology and so I went to grad school – a social and personality psychology program, with an emphasis on health. That lab very much had a positive psychology perspective, even though we focused on mortality. My master's thesis was on healthy aging – what it is, how we measure it, and I also looked at longevity. My focus, following the World Health Organisation, defined health in terms of mental, social and physical wellbeing. As a side project, I helped write a paper with Sonja Lyubomirsky and Ryan Howell [see Howell, Kern & Lyubomirsky, 2007], where we did a meta-analysis looking at positive effect and health outcomes.

As I completed my PhD, I was looking at postdoc opportunities as a next step. My advisor, Howard Friedman, happened to be working on a project with Angela Duckworth. UPenn had a postdoc position available – a project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation on positive health – so I successfully applied for it. I never thought I'd be in an Ivy League university. When I went to the interview, I already had an offer for another research position, and saw the interview as simply a trip

to see Philadelphia and meet some great people. But through the visit, I increasingly felt like it was where I was supposed to be. I was offered the position and accepted shortly thereafter.

As I started the postdoc position, I had limited knowledge about what the positive psychology field was about, and was rather sceptical. I very much had the perspective that it's a "smile and be happy" type of thing, which is a misperception about the field that I have encountered time and time again. My perception changed through my time there, in part through projects I became involved in, which focussed on defining and measuring wellbeing, and especially through working with the Master of Applied Positive Psychology [MAPP] students there. When I first arrived at UPenn, they told me, "You're going to be an assistant instructor for the research methods for MAPP". And I was like, "Okay, that's great; what's MAPP?" Through my involvement in the program, I met extraordinary individuals, and, as I've learned and studied in the field, I've come to appreciate it more and more.

As I left my postdoc to get a real job (laughs), I have ended up in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne as a senior lecturer in positive psychology and I think this is finally when I'm like, "Maybe I am a positive psychologist," but I like to think that I still try to bring a sceptical eye to my thinking about things. So now I'm in it, studying it, for better or for worse.

### **What kind of research projects are you working on these days?**

It depends on the day, or even the time of day. I work on a lot of different projects and have had the opportunity to collaborate with amazing people on all sorts of things. Currently I'm involved in a really great collaboration with people at UPenn, called the World Wellbeing Project and it's a collaboration of computer scientists, psychologists and a growing number of people from other fields. We look at social media, especially like Twitter and Facebook, to understand characteristics about people, communities, etc. There are many times that the project seems like a piece of science fiction. I have come to value the power of interdisciplinary collaboration – it can take our science and research to a whole new level.

Here in Australia, much of my research is turning much more towards thinking about how we actually build positive schools, and thinking about not only students' wellbeing, which I really think has been the focus, but much more about whole school and everything that goes around that.

**What is one aspect of your role that you find really satisfying?**

On the research side, I think one of the most satisfying things is the amazing people that I've had the opportunity to work with. I find it really satisfying to be able to sit down with brilliant people that somehow I get to hang out with, and having fascinating discussions. We throw ideas around and push each other on different levels, resulting in ideas and projects that we could have never imagined on our own.

The other part of my role that I find satisfying is working with students. Pos psych students in particular tend to focus on application, which continually pushes me to think about how basic research can intersect with application to make a real-world difference. I like helping students think through their ideas and create a doable project. I feel that others have mentored me and helped me get to where I'm at, and if I can pass even a bit of that on to others, then it's worthwhile.

**In general terms, from your point of view, what would you say are the defining features of positive psychology?**

Interesting question... We call it "positive psychology" because it was grounded in psychology, but I think we're now moving more towards a positive science. I've heard others say that pos psych is almost like an approach or a lens of looking at things that moves towards what's good, as opposed to focussing on fixing the problems and everything that's wrong. So I see it much more as an umbrella orientation as opposed to as a single field.

**What do you see as the key challenge that is facing positive psychology currently?**

One key challenge that I see in the field is that much of the early work has focused on simple studies, sort of, "Do this intervention and it's going to change you for life," or something like that. Such a

perspective is very short-sighted. In innovation there is something called the hype curve, where you have a new innovation, and you have a whole bunch of hype around it and everybody gets on board, then you get this trough of disappointment. If there is merit to the innovation, then it will mature and last; if not, it fades away as another forgotten creation. We can think of a similar curve for pos psych. We've had that hype. This was necessary to get things going and to get enough people on board with this perspective for the world to take notice and give credence to the field as a whole. But I think if it's really going to be maintained, it needs to get to a deeper level in terms of our methods and the complexity that we bring to it. There are different tools and methods that we can use to help us look at much more complex models of how people really function, and what influences a person's and a community's wellbeing, and how that all comes together, especially longitudinally across the lifespan. We have to go to that level because if we stay at the simple level, then that trough of disappointment is coming. People are going to be disillusioned with pos psych because the simple stuff isn't the lasting part.

**In terms of positive psychology's journey thus far, do you think that the field has fallen short of that hype you speak of?**

I don't think that it has fallen short. I've been amazed as I've talked to people and students about the excitement around the perspective. My fear is that without that strong science and stronger models underneath, it's almost like this false illusion, that once you get past the feel good part then it's going to fall away and it's another thing that passes with the wind. It's important that researchers in the field are doing careful, sophisticated studies, so that as the initial excitement over quick fixes and feeling good fades away, there will remain a very solid foundation to keep building and maturing the field on.

**What more can practitioners do to incorporate and apply positive psychology research into practice?**

Another great question. I think one of the first things is to actually live it out themselves. I think that those of us in the field are very good at telling other people what to do rather than actually doing it ourselves. I do see a lot of people in the field that are very overworked and not taking care of themselves. So part of it is – and I think I can be as guilty of this as the next person – living out the very behaviours, strategies and mindsets that we tell others about.

In terms of the activities themselves, my perspective is that we need to think of things much more in terms of health behaviours, rather than activities. We need to aim for shifts in our perspectives and habitual behaviours, not simply do an activity. An analogy is physical activity. If I want to be fit, going to the gym for a week will have little long-term impact. But if over time I shift to an active lifestyle, then it makes a difference. Similarly, if the exercises are the things that will help me approach life in a more gracious manner, then that might be helpful, whereas just writing a gratitude letter a few times or doing another simple activity for a few weeks is less helpful.

So perhaps it's drawing on different interventions as a way of getting started, but then drawing on the sizable health behaviour change literature for strategies to cultivate positive characteristics and habits. I think the best example of this that we have seen is mindfulness, which is taught in an intensive manner, and seems to be beneficial when it becomes a person's approach to the world. In this case, it has become a positive habit, and is seemingly beneficial physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

**Are there any tools or strategies from positive psychology that you use yourself to enhance your own wellbeing?**

I think my two biggest ones actually aren't considered official positive interventions, but I see them as positive activities that are good for me – physical activity and getting out into nature. These provide a way for me to disconnect from all the stressors around me. Another one that I am trying to learn is self-compassion. We can be really hard on ourselves sometimes and we have to have compassion for ourselves, to know that we don't have to be perfect, that we can mess up when life is really hard, and to be kind ourselves.

**Is there anyone in the field that you look up to?**

There are a lot of great people in the field. I think one person I really look up to is Jane Dutton. She does amazing research and she's also just a wonderful human being. There are a lot of mixed people in the field and I think that the people I look up to the most are the ones that are doing good work but are also really good people because they're the inspiring ones – they maintain their humanity. It seems that the power, prestige and money that comes with a rapidly growing field can take over at times. But there are those people who haven't done that, so I respect them.

### **And plans for the future? What does it look like?**

One project that I'm hoping to focus on grows out of the social media project. I've been really intrigued by this whole idea of what we can learn from the language that people use as an unobtrusive marker of things. Applying this in particular to schools, I'm interested in how we can use language within the school to try to influence change or shifts in the school's culture. We often measure things through self-reported data, but if positive education is really taking hold, then that's going to come out in the words that people are using and ways they are behaving. So my next step is to see how we can tackle this question and what it looks like.

### **Do you have a critical piece of advice that you can offer to aspiring positive psychology researchers?**

I think a key one would be to get out of the pos psych literature. The best scholars in the field are the ones that are trained in other areas, whether it's another part of psychology or other fields. Pos psych is interdisciplinary and diverse, and we need many different perspectives if we are going to face the complex real-world issues that are out there. One thing that I have noticed is that we can be very good at talking to each other – with our own journals, conferences, etc. – creating this nice little bubble of, “We're all doing good things”. Meanwhile, there are a whole lot of people outside who don't respect the positive psychology perspective at all. If you come from an interdisciplinary perspective and then focus on topics related to wellbeing, I think you're going to be a much better scientist and have a much bigger impact. So train diversely, learn a lot of the methodological stuff and don't be afraid to challenge what goes on in the field.

### **Do you think that the people who study positive psychology are happier or less happy than the general population?**

Another interesting question and honestly, part of it is the question of who even studies pos psych – what's the population? (Of course I have to put it in stats terms). You have some who call themselves positive psychologists, and you have a lot of people who study related topics who do not call themselves positive psychologists. Regardless, it is quite a range of personas – you have your super happy people, and you have those people who study it because they need it or something. So, it's actually a normal distribution of people.

**What are your views of the contribution of women in positive psychology? Do you think there is a gender balance in the field?**

It depends on which part of positive psychology you're talking about. With areas like positive education we see more women; in other areas such as positive neuroscience we see fewer. When we consider the top names in the field, there are both men and women. I do think it can be hard for women to get through some of those power structures and to get their name out and be known in and of themselves without having another male name, especially a big name, attached to them. I think we, as women, can undermine ourselves at times, not taking as much credit and putting ourselves out there as much as our male counterparts. It can be an ongoing struggle for many women as to how to balance work and family, receive equal recognition for their efforts, and to not undersell their achievements.

**Where would you like to see positive psychology in the long term, say in 15 years from now?**

I'm not really a long-term thinker. So much changes from year to year. How can we really say where things are going to be going in 15 years? Oftentimes I hear people say they want it to be where we're not calling it pos psych anymore because it's just kind of psychology as usual. But I do think it is valuable in keeping the phrase "positive psychology" dominant, as the language impacts the way people think about things. I guess I think I'd like to see it be integrated into all different levels of education, research and the common person's approach to life more generally.

## Sarah Pressman

Sarah Pressman is an associate professor of psychology and social behavior at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on the interplay between positive emotions, social relationships, stress and health, with a focus on the physiological processes that underlie these associations. Sarah is Director of the STEP (STress, Emotion, & Physical health) Laboratory.

### **In general terms and from your point of view, what are some of the defining features of positive psychology?**

I've always liked the definition of positive psychology that said it's a field where we're going to focus on what's right about people as opposed to the problems that people have and what's wrong with them, and essentially, why it's important to focus on what's right about people, why is it worth studying? That's where my interest comes in: it's worth studying what's right about people so that we can understand why people live longer, why they're healthier, more resilient. It's just so simple and so right on. So much of psychology for so long was focused on simply fixing what's wrong about people and just helping them go from bad to only okay, and that's the major difference. Let's study what makes people gifted, healthy, special, or successful. These are all very important things.

In comparison to psychology in general, I've never been in a field before where the public is so passionate about a topic. When I tell people about health psychology, they are very excited about it. I think it's easy to get people interested in it. Positive psychology, on the other hand, has the public attending research meetings, which I've never seen before in any field, and, frankly I don't think that it has existed in any other field before. That is, having people want to come to scientific talks because they're so passionate about it. I feel that is one of the big differences I see. On top of that, I think the fact that it's so readily transferrable to the public is also a major difference. With a lot of science, including other parts of psychology, it's a very big jump to make people understand why the research matters. Positive psychology, on the other hand, is so naturally applied. Obviously that is true of much of clinical psychology, but clinical psych is more focused on only certain pieces of the population, and positive psychology is really for everybody; it just reaches so many people.

**Would I be right in that you consider yourself a health psychologist who is moving into the area of positive psychology? Why so?**

My training as a graduate student was in social, personality and health psychology. Positive psychology as a field had barely touched on health psychology at that point. I started my education passionate about stress and how stress was making people sick, and understanding the processes by which stress gets under your skin to alter your immune system and your physical health. While that passion continues, as a graduate student I also became really interested in whether there are things that are the antidotes to stress. I started looking at positive emotions, social support and the more protective factors. And that is really what I've been doing ever since then. Health psychologists have been doing this type of work for some time, and didn't call it positive psychology, but now we have a name for it. Certainly at this point, the bulk of my work is studying what keeps us healthy. What are factors that confer resilience, that protect us against stress, that keep us alive longer? And those things are frequently positive psychology related topics; all the positive states and traits and behaviours. I think my work is at the intersection of health and positive psychology at this point.

What is interesting is that there is hesitancy for some people in other fields to call themselves positive psychologists because that's either not how they were trained, or because there is a backlash against it. That creates resistance, and some people say, "No, no, that's not what I do!" I think it is not that uncommon for some people who are doing positive psychology research to avoid saying that they're positive psychologists. My training was health psychology, so does that mean I'm a positive psychologist now because I study positive emotions and health? It's hard to say, but I think yes.

**Thinking about "positive health," which professional groups of people are most interested in harnessing positive psychology? For example, nurses, doctors?**

It varies, I'd say. Business is very interested in it now: they really want to keep their employees healthy; there's a lot of consulting happening where people are trying to make healthier, happier workplaces. I like to talk to doctors and nurses about it, medical practitioners and public health officials. I think that nurses have the most buy-in, as they are much more integrated into the day-to-day lives of medical patients and interact with them more. I think because of that they are more interested in quality of life issues and patient happiness, as opposed to medical doctors, who have so little time with every patient and are focused on a quick diagnosis and treatment plan. I don't think they could imagine spending a lot of time thinking about the happiness of their patients in a meaningful way. It's also not part of their training model. They don't learn about mind-body medicine, about how happiness might actually

matter for health. They're rarely trained in doctor-patient relationships and how to keep these positive and why that would even matter. These are all things that any health psychologist would think critical. That being said, there is some evidence that the importance of this topic is starting to sneak into the awareness of medical practitioners. For example, this year I'm giving a talk at a conference in Mexico for a group called Doctor Payaso ([doctorpayaso.com](http://doctorpayaso.com)), which in Spanish translates to "doctors and nurses who believe in healing with love and joy," inspired by the story of Patch Adams. They have an entire conference devoted to this concept, which is quite incredible. Similarly, I've been getting more invitations to speak at medical conferences about the importance of positive psychology for doctors and patients, for example, the Canadian Emergency Medicine Conference and the American College of Rheumatology. So I think in the next few years we may see more and more interest from a broader array of medical areas.

**If I give you one million dollars to make the world both a happier and healthier place, how would you spend it?**

A million is not enough! Coming from my medical / psychology perspective, I think we need to spend the money doing two things. One is reformatting how we practice medicine – this is not a small thing. I think we focus too much in all countries on just helping people who are already sick – you get a disease, we are going to try and fix you; you have high blood pressure, we're going to bring it down; you have cancer, we're going to try to cure it – instead of focusing on prevention, resilience and keeping people healthy, which is essentially the same idea of positive psychology. If we focus on these positive things, we are going to protect people, and currently we are not doing that. If we can start altering how clinicians and doctors are rewarded for taking care of their patients, so that there are incentives to keep people healthy, that would probably be the biggest bang for your buck in terms of getting people healthier and happier. At that point, doctors and clinicians are going to realise that they need to focus on this positive stuff to keep people resilient and keep them healthier over time, and that will translate into better health. That will involve lobbying and changing public policy, insurance systems, how we train doctors so they know the mind-body stuff. Maybe with a billion dollars...

Medicine is fundamentally based on the old model of keeping people healthy, pre-positive psychology, so we need positive medicine. I'm biased; living in the US, the more sick your patients are the more money you make – the pharmaceutical companies, the insurance companies, the doctors – and so that has to be changed. You can't make a profit off people being sick, you have to profit off people being healthy. So I guess the second thing I would do to keep people happier and healthy is have universal

health care for everyone. People have to be able to get the help they need for their physical and mental health when they need it, and not be worried about the cost of staying healthy.

### **Which positive psychological interventions go well together with more traditional health or behaviour change interventions?**

The bottom line is that we don't really know the answer to this yet. I've been hesitant to jump into the intervention area because the piece we are missing right now is what kinds of positive things work best with different behaviours, diseases, outcomes; I think it's really subtle. A lot of our interventions right now, we treat them as though that's going to equally affect health, and I don't think that's true. Mindfulness is very popular in medicine right now. It has a lovely calming and anti-stress effect, and it might help someone with a stress-related illness. But if you have someone who is trying to get motivated to do an exercise programme and lose weight, I don't know if mindfulness is necessarily going to help them. What they need is energy, goal setting and motivation. We haven't really pulled those things apart so that we have a targeted list of "this goes well with this". There have been a few studies that have shown (not in the intervention sense, but in the trait association) that happier people die sooner of some diseases – you've got to think that sometimes positive emotion is not going to be useful. If you have end-stage renal disease and your kidneys are failing, trying to be happy at that time is not necessarily what you want. Maybe what you want is an organizational and motivational plan to manage your symptoms, planning your dialysis schedule, and so forth. That's going to be a very different intervention.

I go back to the point I made previously, related to stress: any of these positive things in general are likely to have anti-stress effects and thus those stress-related diseases / behaviours will have some use for this. Beyond that, we really need to do a lot of basic research about what the active components are and how they are connecting to the different outcomes.

### **Which countries or organizations do you see harnessing the power of positive health?**

The companies I see really interested in it are those with employee assistance programs. They are very much on board, going to conferences and building content for their employees and customers based on positive psychology related topics, for example, how individuals should laugh more to exercise their heart or why they should smile more for their health. That's something I definitely see. I see there are also large corporations monitoring world health and happiness and their associations, like Gallup. Similarly, I recently received a grant from the US Travel Association for something called "Project Time

Off". This organization is extremely interested in positive health because they firmly believe that people need to make time to be happy and relax so that they can maintain their health. Finally, the technology industry is certainly getting into health apps, many with a positive psychology component. So as you can see, organizations are definitely starting to accept and prioritize positive health, but I'm not seeing as much buy-in from governments, countries, schools, outside of standard health education and the slow growing interest in Gross National Happiness (GNH).

### **What are some of the coolest findings to date related to positive health?**

I'm probably biased because of my training but I think that the Sheldon Cohen cold studies are the coolest studies. These are studies where we monitor psychological states and traits, then experimentally expose individuals to the cold virus. We then monitor them for objective cold virus replication and objective symptoms over a period of one week. What Sheldon has shown with these well-crafted studies is that individuals who are higher in positive emotional style are less likely to catch a cold or flu virus when droplets of the virus are put in their nose. It's unbelievably compelling. Now, it's important to note that positive emotion is not experimentally manipulated in these studies, so we don't know what the factors that made them positive to begin with are, but at least we know that everyone got exposed to the same viruses.

I'm also very impressed when we see consistency in data, for example, the mortality data related to happiness is impressive in its replicability. We reviewed the literature in 2005, then Steptoe meta-analysed this data more recently and had the same findings regarding happier people consistently living longer. While there was some recent excitement over a recent study in the Lancet not showing this effect, there are very few studies that don't show this effect, and the effect sizes can be quite meaningful. For example, in our data we had a five to six-year benefit for those who were more positive. When you tell someone that you can give them five additional years of life if they are happier, then that's a pretty cool finding.

I've definitely gotten really excited about the smiling stuff I'm doing now, again my own bias because it's what I'm working on. We show that even if you're not happy, being forced to smile can reduce your stress reactivity. The fact that this works is a really compelling suggestion that our positive behaviours, even if we're not feeling happy, can have a profound effect on what our physiology is doing. It's just so simple – smile and lower your blood pressure and heart rate. We also have a new paper coming out soon where we had people smile without knowing they were smiling by getting them to hold chopsticks

in their mouth whilst getting a fake flu vaccination. We dropped pain by 40% just by having them smile during it! We dropped their stress reactivity and their stress recovery so the cardiovascular system was not as stressed, and they self-reported that they felt less stressed as well. Again, it's so simple, and that's one of the lessons I like from the positive health literature: These helpful antidotes to stress don't need to be complicated. If you tell a doctor that you want their patients to go through a month-long gratitude intervention, they'll ask, "Who's paying for it?" and, "How am I going to get them to do that? I'm not going to have time to monitor this". So the simpler we can get these activities, the better.

Another cool area might be the work that's been done showing simple factors that get people out of the hospital sooner after being ill. For example, Mike Scheier shows that optimistic people get out of the hospital faster after stroke and heart attack and there are studies that show that having a window that overlooks a park when recovering from surgery has similar effects. This type of work reminds me a lot of the clever studies by Ellen Langer showing that older individuals who have a plant to take care of survive longer than those who do not. So we see that manipulations restoring calm via nature, control via having something to take care of, or people simply seeing the bright side of life, can have profound and meaningful impacts on our health.

### **What do you think of the gender ratio / balance in positive psychology?**

Thinking back to the last International Positive Psychology Association [IPPA] meeting [2015], I didn't really notice the gender discrepancy there; I felt it was somewhat equal. Men and women both care about happiness, and I feel that translates into the field of positive psychology. When you look at who spoke at IPPA, it was far more males, so I think perhaps we need to do a better job making sure that we have a balanced ratio on stage at our meetings.

### **What are the best resources to read on positive health?**

Right now there is no book on positive health, but there is one in the works. In the meantime, there are a couple of things you can do: (1) look at a normal health psychology text book and pull out the positive psychology aspects – it's just not currently together in one place; (2) look at the published reviews regarding positive health, for example Ed Diener's reviews on subjective wellbeing and health, my reviews on positive emotion in health, Julia Boehm on cardiovascular correlates of wellbeing and so forth. Seligman's general, "What is positive health?" overview is also an interesting read, due to his interesting take on positive health as a "super health" construct.

**Ok, an extra question. Are there any areas of health in particular (physical activity / obesity) that you think are a neglected area or a developing focus, in other words, a target area of health?**

I really believe that the benefit of positive stuff is that it confers resilience against stress. So if you think of any diseases or behaviours that are really affected by stress and how that interferes with either physiological processes or behaviours, I think that's the goldmine for future work. I think where it's going to be most useful is with things like heart disease. I'm not sure about cancer prevention because we don't have as much data showing that stress causes cancer, but certainly if you have a serious disease such as cancer that induces high stress, positive psychology might help with managing the distressing aspects of that disease. It might help you to find benefit, focus on the positives; to not get into the downward spiral of giving up, feeling hopeless and not trying to get healthy again. From a health behaviour standpoint, there are a lot of "good for you" activities that go out the window when stress rises. For example, when stressed, we usually don't make time for exercise, give up on our diets and sleep less well. Thus, I think a compelling new direction would be seeing how health behaviors can improve or withstand change from stress via positive psych interventions. A great relevant study by Bob Emmons showed that individuals who did the "three good things" gratitude exercise before bed over a few weeks had improved sleep. Another promising new area is in the pain literature. Alex Zautra has a model of how positive emotion can stop negative spirals of stress and negative effect resulting from pain, and so I think chronic pain samples will be an especially good future test group for positive psychology. A large part of pain's negative effects are due to your subjective evaluation and response to the symptom. If we can alter that subjective piece via positive psychology, we could potentially improve the quality of life of millions of pain patients.

## **Jacci Norrish**

Jacci Norrish has a passion for the promotion of mental health and prevention of mental illness, and that passion has led her to completing a PhD in applied positive psychology in schools. Since completing her PhD in 2010, she has actively pursued development opportunities in mindfulness, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and has taught on these topics in the psychology, medicine and business departments at Monash University. As a practitioner, Jacci has worked with Geelong Grammar School on their sustainable school-wide implementation of positive education, and Berry Street School on their positive education curriculum for students who are disengaged from mainstream education. She recently published her first book: Positive Education: The Geelong Grammar School Journey, which provides a comprehensive overview of how Geelong Grammar School is implementing positive education across all levels of their school culture and community.

### **Can you tell us a bit about how you initially got interested in positive psychology?**

Oh gosh, so I've always been interested in psychology and I was sitting in a lecture very early on in my studies, in the first year or so, perhaps in 2001 or 2002, learning about the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy model and the link between what we experience and how we think about that, and our emotions and reactions. I thought to myself at the time that this should be something that everyone knows about and this should be something that is taught in schools. That was just a fleeting thought at the time and that was the little seed that started a huge passion and interest in the prevention of mental health disorders and the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing. And so when I came to my honours year, I met Dr Dianne Vella-Brodrick, who was one of the first academics in Australia to be explicitly researching positive psychology concepts, and we wrote and published a paper together. Then I decided to continue that on within my larger studies in psychology, and started my PhD the next year.

### **Can you tell us a bit about what you're doing now?**

I'm about to have a baby, Austin... (Laughs).

**What I meant was that you went on to do your PhD in positive psychology. Where has that taken you with your work?**

My PhD was in the area of school-based applications, so since then I have worked in consultation and collaboration with schools in embedding positive psychology principles into their curriculum, frameworks and approaches, most extensively with Geelong Grammar School – I've been very honoured to be part of the work that goes on in their community – but also with Berry Street School and many different schools across Melbourne and Victoria.

**What is one aspect of your work that you find really satisfying?**

I think what I love most about schools and school-based positive education is the ability or the necessity of thinking systemically. You have to think about the child in the classroom, in the school environment, in the school culture, as well as the interaction with the family and the wider community. The complexity in terms of how you support and build wellbeing in a young person is really fascinating and has a lot of depth to it, and I find it really captivating work.

**In general terms and from your point of view, what would you say are some of the defining features of positive psychology?**

I think it's a focus on things that everybody can do to promote good mental health. I think that it's unique in its universal application. I think it's a focus on building wellbeing and nurturing wellbeing and taking care of your wellbeing, versus the treatment of ill health. Also, I don't think we always get this right, but a defining feature is the focus on the whole picture. For example, the interaction between positive and negative experiences, positive and negative emotions, and the importance of looking at life and behaviour and choices in a comprehensive way.

**You're renowned for your work and expertise in positive education. Can you tell our readers a little bit about what positive education is and how it can be applied in schools?**

I see positive education as where the knowledge of wellbeing and positive psychology meets life at a school. So, it's a really nice partnership and I think it works extremely well when we take the science of wellbeing and use it to enhance what teachers are naturally doing really well in the classroom, and what

school staff in general are naturally doing really well within the school communities. For me, it is about helping children and young people to develop those really important emotional and social skills, and to help them to grow in ways that promote good mental health and wellbeing.

**What would you say is your proudest moment in the field thus far?**

I always feel extremely proud when I see little kids meditating. It's very hopeful and moving to see young people learning those invaluable skills and I feel that I'm part of a very large team of people who are encouraging and nurturing that. I think those are probably my proudest and most meaningful moments.

**What would be a key piece of advice you could offer to teachers who are interested in integrating positive psychology or positive education more in the classroom?**

Gosh... Look at what you're already doing well, and really start by celebrating and capitalising on that. Then from that, use it as a base to implement some very helpful strategies. If I was to recommend that teachers start somewhere, I would recommend mindfulness, character strengths or growth mindsets – ideally a combination, more ideally, all three.

**Do you think that people who study positive psychology are happier or less happy than the general population?**

I think it would be really nice to think that they're happier and I think that that is certainly very often the case, but I also think that within our field we have a lot of driven and busy people and I think that being busy is not a positive psychology intervention. I think that the passion and the drive and the striving sometimes has a cost to wellbeing and it is up to every individual to balance that a little bit.

**In terms of your own wellbeing, are there any tools or strategies from positive psychology that you use?**

I'm not sure. At times I use all of it and not only from positive psychology. I'm very grateful for my extensive training and education in psychology generally. The thing that I feel that is the most

fundamental to me is that the person knows their values and lives in accordance with them. Values play an extremely important and consistent role in my life and in the life of my family.

**Do you have any thoughts about the contribution of women in positive psychology? Like, for instance, do you think that there is a gender balance across the field?**

Oh gosh, I think that's a complicated question and I think that there are a lot of women who are doing extremely amazing work but there are also a lot of men who do amazing work. So that's at the level of those who have really pushed the field forward, but it's also at the level of the people who are involved on a practical basis: the students and the professionals who are researching and applying positive psychology in different ways. For example, I meet a lot of inspiring female teachers doing breathtaking work building wellbeing in students, but I meet a lot of wonderful male teachers too. So I don't know; that's a complicated question.

**Where would you like to see positive psychology in the long term?**

I would like the whole conversation about mental health to have progressed, so that there is a combination of less stigma for mental ill health and mental illness, and for people to feel comfortable to openly talk about their experiences of a range of mental disorders. I would also like to see people focus on their wellbeing and promoting good mental health on a daily basis, and for that to be a real priority in individual lives, in the community, and in wider society. Positive psychology has a lot to offer in moving that conversation forward.

## Emma Seppälä

Emma Seppälä, PhD, is the Science Director of Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Her areas of research include positive organizational psychology, health psychology, cultural psychology, wellbeing and resilience. Emma is a frequent contributor to Harvard Business Review, Psychology Today and Scientific American Mind, and is the founder and editor-in-chief of Fulfillment Daily. She consults with Fortune 500 leaders and employees on building positive organizations. In addition, she is a Research Scientist and Honorary Fellow with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Centre for Investigating Healthy Minds. Emma's new book, *The Happiness Track*, published by HarperCollins, discusses the fascinating science of success.

### **Could you tell us about your background?**

I got my PhD in psychology at Stanford and am currently the Science Director at the Stanford University Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Prior to that, I did my post-doc at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with Dr Richard Davidson.

### **I originally found you and your magnificent work while researching for material on trauma recovery. I was excited to see that you also include compassion in your work. What prompted you to become interested in those very topics?**

Oftentimes when people go through trauma, they develop a very different kind of understanding of what other people are going through. That can lead to compassion because you actually understand suffering and what it means. I'm interested in how meditation-based practices can help people deal with trauma and that's why I conducted research on breathing-based practices for veterans with trauma. Compassion wasn't the focus of that particular research study but I noticed that veterans tend to be very compassionate in the sense that they are service-oriented and they tend to put others first. So when they got over the trauma, many of them went on to do service in their own community, which is very much in line with their values and who they are to begin with.

**What do you think are some of the most interesting discoveries in the field of compassion research?**

**What have you been most excited or surprised about recently or in the past?**

To me, the most interesting thing is that people have this misconception that they'll be happy if they achieve, purchase, or get certain things. But what the research is actually showing is that they'll be happier if they give things away, if they take care of others, if they are engaged in some kind of activity that is generous and compassionate. So it's the ultimate paradox. The messages marketers and society give us are different from the research findings. If we live a life of service we actually live longer, we are happier and healthier. It's quite amazing and something that is just not known widely enough. People often still think they'll be happy if they get X, Y or Z, and that's not necessarily true.

**I've known you for a few years now and think you're one of the most giving, caring people I know.**

**Would you say that you always had a vision to do something that will empower people and enable them to have opportunities to live a fuller life?**

I had loving parents and always knew that I was lucky. I always wanted to give back in some way and was looking for a way to do that. I figured that maybe I could help people be happier and so that's why I went in that direction. Trauma relief is one way and writing about things like happiness, gratitude, compassion and organizational psychology are too. All of that can help people understand what creates a life that's fulfilling. That's the kind of little contribution that I can make, given the training that I have, and this is what I'm trying to do. I wish I could do more, honestly.

**Was psychology always your thing, or did you have some other career options in mind when growing up?**

I lived in China after college for two years and saw people that were happier than many of the people living here – even though they had less and had a much more difficult life. That's when I decided I needed to research happiness because clearly it had little to do with material goods. Later I did my master's in East-Asian studies at Columbia University. I got really interested in Eastern thought, which then led me to research meditation. This is what led me to my PhD program and the research that I did there, which naturally contributes to what I'm doing right now.

**Your first book comes out in January [2016] and is called The Happiness Track. Could tell us a bit about the big idea of the book and what kind of impact you hope it'll have in the lives of people who read it?**

Yes, I have a book that's coming out on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2016. People have the misconception that overworking themselves leads to success and happiness. What I reveal in my new book, The Happiness Track, is that what science actually shows is that happiness leads to success, not the other way around. The kind of success that I'm talking about here is the kind that is sustainable, not the kind that burns you out, which is really what a lot of people are doing. In all the places I have lived and worked – Silicon Valley, Stanford, Yale – I've seen people burn themselves out again and again, and I too had that experience at times. When I look at the research and positive organizational research in particular, the data all points to the fact that the theories people often have about success are all wrong. The book chapters cover things like how to build resilience in your nervous system and why being present is so powerful, not just with regards to your productivity but also charisma. I talk about managing your energy and how it makes you more productive. I talk about compassion and self-compassion – they stand in the face of ideas we have about being self-critical and always looking out for ourselves and elbowing others out of the way to get ahead.

**What I hear you saying is that happiness lies within and is not about the pursuit of external goals. You write about meditation too and to take time for oneself, right?**

This book is really about much more than that, but meditation is definitely one aspect of it. In many ways, taking care of yourself is a secret to long-term success and taking care of yourself means taking care of your happiness. I talk about the different ways in which you can do this and how it fosters your ability to think outside the box and have sustained energy and things like that, which is really what we all want.

**I know there might be people reading the book who are perhaps considering a career in research and academia. What is some advice you would give to them?**

The most important thing I can say is to make sure you select a mentor who truly cares about you. Furthermore, you should not just talk to them but you should talk to all of their students and make sure all of their students love the mentor and feel extremely fortunate to be in their lab. Period. That is the

only advice I can give, and I think it's the most important advice because it's going to influence everything for you.

**I'm happy you shared that thought. In fact, it reminds me of something you told me a couple of years ago when advising me to always surround myself with givers, and, of course, to always be one myself. I've passed your advice on to so many people, and following it has had a huge impact on my life.**

That's great to hear!

**What are some of the most amazing changes you've witnessed in people who've started practicing mediation?**

With the veterans, for example, when they started doing these breathing practices that we have researched, they were able to sleep again after years of insomnia and without the help of recreational drugs such as alcohol and other tools they were often using. That's just huge! They said things like, "Thank you for giving me my life back". They stopped being afraid of many things. Some were living bunkered up in their basement and they started having a life again, started having relationships with people again. They started smiling again. For me personally, that was probably the biggest thing. There were some veterans that I had known for months and years who I'd never seen smile and they started smiling again. One of them said, "I feel like a kid again," and his dad said, "I have my son back". So that's very meaningful, and it happened through the Sudarshan Kriya breathing practices we researched. These techniques are not the same as mindfulness but they lead to a calm and quiet state of mind. Right now, in the mainstream there is this view that mindfulness is the cure for almost everything. However, it's a very intellectual practice, researched by very intellectual people (academics), beloved by very intellectual people (white collar) but it's not for everybody. It's a cognitive exercise and there are lots of different types of meditation, and people would benefit from understanding that. I personally don't like to do a mediation that is a cognitive exercise because my work is highly cognitive. I choose a meditation practice that helps me let go rather than keep focusing. It helps balance me. Same thing with the veterans: sitting and doing a cognitive exercise might not be the best approach for them.

**You're referring to the embodied nature of trauma, right? There is so much to learn when it comes to engaging the body when we talk about healing practices.**

Indeed, there is this whole field called embodied cognition that is coming out and which discusses how changes in our body impact our mind. I think there is a shift in paradigms happening. We've been so focused on the brain and the head, as if that were the central command system. I think that's old news, and now let's move on because we are not just our brains. We are an entire being, including a body.

**Imagine if René Descartes had never been born and he had not helped onset the movement which views the mind and the body as separate. What kind of a world would we be living in?**

That's interesting. Maybe someone else would have come up with the idea. Anyway, there is a reason why people go for massages and exercise. There's a reason why people even drink. They drink because it impacts their body, and when it impacts the body, it impacts the mind. The interconnected nature of the mind and the body should not be such a foreign idea, really.

**Who have been some of your biggest inspirations or mentors during your career?**

One of them is James Gross, my PhD advisor at Stanford. He is a giver and there is a clear reason why he is one of the most beloved professors on Stanford campus. He focuses 100% on his colleagues and students and gives them his full and undivided attention. So, he's been a wonderful mentor. Also Dr James Doty, director of CCARE [The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education] at Stanford, has just really shown me what a compassionate leader is. I've seen how he's treated his staff. Even in situations where someone did something that was clearly not in his favor, he still understood where they were coming from and was very giving and kind. So he really walks the talk. Someone who is not from academia but who I appreciate greatly is Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. He really embodies all of what I talk about when I talk about being present. I don't refer to him as an academic role model but as someone who, when I first met him, I thought to myself, this is the kind of person I want to be. I want to be someone who is so in service to others, uplifts everyone around, and makes them feel happier and inspired to serve. That's just amazing.

**I see you as a great example of a leader who is strong yet compassionate and kind. I'm really curious to hear what your message would be to a new generation of leaders and future influencers within academia or business.**

Take care of others and take care of yourself, and understand that taking care of others is part of taking care of yourself. It's simple but that's really it. Taking care of others is such a huge source of happiness, wellbeing and meaning in life. It creates community, it creates trust, and it counters loneliness, which is a huge problem in our society. Loneliness is the number one reason why people seek out therapy. You will feel that connection which we all yearn to experience and which is the very basis of happiness. This, and to take care of your own health. Not forgetting that because it is so easy to forget.

**I've heard Dr Martin Seligman say that, "The world is turning," by which he meant that the world is becoming more open to positive psychology and its applications. Do you see this shift in bringing the science of compassion and happiness to different domains of life? I know you speak in the corporate world; you've spoken at Google and so on. What's your experience of this?**

Yes, I think people are interested. Research on positive organizational scholarship is showing that compassionate workplaces are just going to be better for the bottom line in many ways. You have more loyalty, better productivity, better customer service, better collegiality. There is so much to it that it's almost overwhelming. Companies are starting to understand that what really benefits them is to take care of employees. Doing so is going to benefit them and impact all the employees, all the families of all the employees who work there, and, by extension, all the communities the families influence. What this means is that if you can make an organization happier, you can influence society in a big way. All of this is quite amazing.

**What's some advice you'd give to your younger self? Furthermore, how can we help young people cope with the stress and pressure the current society puts on their shoulders?**

Again, it comes back to the self-care piece. I was in college when I first discovered meditation. I feel like right now most of the messages we get are just to keep working, produce more, be innovative, start your start-up even earlier. Start it in your teens if you can! There is such a message of drive that we're going into overdrive. It's too much and there is not enough time for self-care, so people are driving themselves to the ground earlier in life. They also often define themselves by what they do. This is another problem because what if you're not successful in that field? So I think the most important thing as a young person is to get centred within yourself, be happy within yourself, and you do that by taking care of yourself. You can do that with meditation, yoga or whatever it is that helps you stay peaceful inside your heart. Then move and act from that place. Don't move from a place of, "Okay, I'm going to

throw myself at this, that and the other, and completely lose myself". Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter how much you've achieved if you're going to be completely killed by it, you're going to be anxious and you might feel emptiness in your life. I think what we need to remember is the self-care piece, especially in this day and age, where all our attention is pointed outward. Many of the young people have lived their entire lives on social media and almost everything they do is on social media. Are you still present for whatever it is that you're doing when you're stretching that selfie-stick, if you know what I mean. In college I wish I had known all this. I started meditation back then but it wasn't as popular as now, so I didn't have a lot of resources. I wish I had learned back then how to cultivate inner peace and take time every day for myself to just get centered, to get calm, to disconnect, and all of that stuff.

**Indeed, thanks for introducing me to the Sudarshan Kriya breathing technique. It's something I keep in my mental health tool kit. How many years have you been meditating? I remember you've been very consistent with it.**

I've been meditating for about 12 years. Well, I just became a mom so I don't always get to meditate twice a day but I've been very consistent with my breathing every single day. I meditate usually once a day for sure.

**What do you hope to see emerge as the hottest area of research within positive psychology in the coming years?**

Positive organizational scholarship, definitely. What I've noticed from positive organizational psychologists is that they are very humble and really walk the talk. If you walk the talk, you're humble, right? As a consequence, the word about their research hasn't gone out yet big time, and that's why I'm writing about it a lot. Because people need to know about it.

**You mean research by people like Jane Dutton and so on?**

Yes, it's so sweet because these researchers are actually doing what they're saying. They're compassionate, they're humble, and therefore they don't have a megaphone or they don't toot their own horn. So that field, I think, is just going to explode because there is just so much good research in there.

**Finally, because I'm a quote junkie, I would love to hear if you have a favorite quote and if you wouldn't mind sharing it with us.**

Yes, I have one. It's by Rabindranath Tagore and goes like this, "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy".

## Lea Waters

Lea Waters (PhD) is a professor of psychology. She holds the Gerry Higgins Chair in Positive Psychology and is the Director of the Centre for Positive Psychology, University of Melbourne. Lea has an affiliate position with Cambridge University's Wellbeing Institute (UK) as well as the Centre for Positive Organizations at the University of Michigan (USA). Lea is internationally recognised and has published and presented in the USA, Canada, UK, Asia and Europe. She was named the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Educator of the Year in 2004, received an Australian University Individual Teaching Excellence Award from the Australian Prime Minister in 2007 as well as a team Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning from the Australian Government's Office for Teaching and Learning in 2013. In 2015, Lea was listed in the Top 100 Women of Influence in Australia (Financial Review and Westpac Bank) and was inducted as a Fellow in the International Positive Psychology Association. Lea is currently writing her first book *The Strong Child: Building Optimism, Resilience and Achievement* with Penguin Press.

**In your view and in general terms, what would you say are the defining features of positive psychology?**

I see the science of positive psychology in terms of a four-pillared stool. So that means we have four defining features and we need all four of them for the stool to stand up. When we take one away the stool will fall over. Those defining features are, firstly, that we study the positively oriented constructs. Secondly, that we've really established ourselves at the start as being a rigorous science, and so we've got lab designs through to field research. The third pillar is that we explore our research at multiple levels, so we are interested in flourishing at the individual level, at group level, and at the organisational / community level. And then the fourth pillar is that we are committed to translating science into practice. So for me, they are the defining features and they all intersect. They make positive psychology what it is and if we take one of them away, we somehow lose a bit of the essence of the field.

Then I think we can also just look at that in more general terms, just in terms of who we are as a community rather than our science. I think that's important because I've really enjoyed being a part of the positive psychology community and I think community is a defining feature of the field. Particularly what I see in contrast to my former field, which was organisational psychology, I see that the positive

psychology community has the features of generosity and collaboration, much more open sharing of ideas compared to my former field. I think that's because we're building a new field, so we understand that we need strength in numbers. I also think that there's a bit of self-selection effect in terms of the type of person who is attracted to the field of positive psychology. These are people who have perhaps a bit more of a service ethic and are interested in asking those deeper questions about how we raise the consciousness of ourselves as a species. How do we take care of each other and take care of the planet?

**It seems that positive psychology for you is going well beyond the individual level focus and moving beyond just the focus on positively oriented states as well. Is that something that you feel positive psychology has done well enough so far?**

I think that we can grow both of those things. One of the things that I'm interested in at the moment is the work that's coming out of the University of East London, and the idea of positive psychology 2.0. That's connected in with Professor Paul Wong as well, which is the idea that even though the pillar is that we study positively oriented constructs, we now question more deeply, or have a more nuanced view about what we mean by "positive". And sometimes positive can be growth-based, even though it's not a pleasant experience for us.

Two of the topics that I study are gratitude and mindfulness. They both have a duality to them. They are both under the umbrella of positive psychology because they are both positively oriented constructs, but they're not purely and straightforwardly positive. Mindfulness leads to positive outcomes, but it is a state of being present to all of your experiences in the present moment, some of which are pleasant and some of which are unpleasant. In my recent publication on gratitude, where we looked at the role that gratitude can play with school principals and administrators, we found a duality in that data set in that the principals were saying, "This is a good practice, it's a positive practice. I want to continue doing it; I'm getting many benefits from it." But it's also not always a pleasant practice because it creates a sense of indebtedness; it creates a sense of vulnerability at that group level. An unintended negative effect of them practicing more gratitude with their staff was that some staff were feeling unrecognized and left out. For example, people questioned, "Why did you thank them and not me?"

To answer your question about could we go further... I think we could. In terms of our focus at the individual level, that makes sense to me, because psychologists typically focus on the individual level and I guess the origins of positive psychology were more coming out of clinical / counselling psychology, rather than social psychology. But I think we're seeing more evidence from social psychology, and certainly the move in organisations, and positive organisational scholarship has really created a big emphasis on how to create flourishing at that group and organisational level.

### **Can you tell me a little bit about how you became interested in the field?**

Well back in the 80's when I was studying my undergraduate psychology degree (how embarrassing, the 1980s!... Laughs). I definitely studied the work of Seligman, I studied the work of Ryan and Deci. We went back to Maslow and Karen Horney and people like that. I think even as an undergraduate I found that those topics were easier to study for the exams. I was just naturally interested in them. But of course we didn't have the field of positive psychology back then. The real point where I started to become interested was when I was pregnant with my first child and that was in 2002. And so actually it was my personal interest that led me into the field of positive psychology rather than my professional interest. I was pregnant and I had just left work six weeks before my son was due when I bought the book *Authentic Happiness*, because that had just been published in 2002.

So I was sitting at home and was thinking, "I haven't got much to do, I'm pretty heavy with pregnancy so it's not like I can go and run a marathon, so ... (Laughs) ...I'll start to read some books instead". And because of my earlier interest in the area during my undergrad, I picked up Seligman's *Authentic Happiness*. I just can tell you that from that moment on I was hooked. I was like, this is how I want to live my life, and it's definitely how I want to raise my kids.

So I came into it through a personal interest but then when I went back to work I started to bring it into my teaching. The undergrads loved it, as you well know Gavin. I started to bring it into my consulting and so I started to infuse it into my professional life. Then probably about five years after that I felt I really needed to start bringing this into my research programs. Now I'm just at a really happy point where I'm 20 years into my career, I'm 13 years into parenthood and I feel that positive psychology is this lovely nexus point that integrates my personal and professional life.

**So you really try and integrate it into your personal life as well as study it professionally?**

I do, and I started off with it in my personal life, and now it's a topic that I teach, it's a topic that I research, but I still think if I had to choose between the two, if someone said to me, "You can only have this in your professional life or you can only have this in your personal life," I would choose my personal life. Even though professionally it's been really rewarding for me because it's made a really big difference to just the way I operate as a person – and that flows into my personal life too, as you know, being a colleague of mine, you know how it is that I operate professionally – it's not just what I research and what I teach, but just the type of leader that I try to be.

**Is there any particular intervention or concept from the field that you've found particularly helpful?**

Do I just have to choose one?

**No, feel free to choose as many as you like.**

For me, there's two real stand-outs. The first one is the strengths-based approach, or the paradigm shift – that re-orientation towards looking for strengths, and building strengths, rather than seeking to fix weakness. That's had a really profound effect on me as a person and how I've understood myself, how I've shaped my own career based on that knowledge, and, as I said, the type of parent that I've been. I'm much more aware now of how much of my time and energy goes into identifying and building strengths, be it in a colleague of mine, be it in a graduate student, be it in a research project – compared to how much of my time and energy goes into fixing the weaknesses. So that's had a really big effect on me.

The other one is gratitude. Gratitude has had a really powerful effect on my life. It's helped me to move forward from some periods of darkness and trouble, and I just find now that I do my gratitude practices every day. They're a routine part of my life. They help me have perspective on things. I use gratitude a lot in terms of finding benefit through adversity. That's not just personal adversity, but, of course, building the Centre for Positive Psychology [at the University of Melbourne] for the last five years. There's been lots of trials and tribulations through that process, and gratitude has been like this anchor point that I keep coming back to. When I'm frustrated with politics, when I'm thwarted by a lack of budget, I just return back to gratitude and think, "Aren't I lucky that I'm even on this journey in the first

place?” that I’m struggling to set up the Centre for Positive Psychology. I’m lucky that I even have the opportunity to do that. So it’s had a powerful effect on me.

**That brings us nicely to my next question... Do you think people who study positive psychology are more or less happy than the general population?**

(Laughs). That’s a tough question because the researcher in me wants to say we need to do a randomized controlled design (laughs). So I’m not really sure if I can say we’re happier as a field. Speaking as an academic, I’d say that most of the researchers in the field are all working really long hours to build a field. So I’m not sure if we’re happier, but I do get a sense that as a positive psychology community we’re potentially higher on other elements of wellbeing. We’re fairly high on meaning, we’re fairly high on engagement, we’re fairly high on relationships. I think that’s partly because a lot of us use the science of positive psychology in our own lives and that builds our wellbeing, but I also think it’s what I mentioned before where we feel a sense of connection to others who are in the field, and that boosts our wellbeing.

**Do you think there’s an expectation that because you work in the field that you ought to be happier than the general population?**

Yes, I definitely think there’s an expectation. It’s not foreign to me because prior to moving into positive psychology when I was studying organisational psychology, I had a similar sort of expectation from others that because I had a PhD in psychology that I would just automatically understand all of human nature and all of human behaviour. So I was kind of used to that external perception that psychology gives us this sort of secret knowledge. It definitely gives us knowledge – beneficial knowledge compared to people who haven’t studied it – but it’s not the cure-all. I do think that we are held to higher standards in the field of positive psychology, compared to other fields in that regard.

**What would you say are some of the most valid criticisms of positive psychology as a field?**

I do think that one of the valid criticisms is that we’re very Western-centric in the research that we do, in the underlying assumptions that we’ve made about the value of wellbeing. I’ve seen that myself while working with some schools in Asia. I guess I naturally come in with these implicit unquestioned philosophies about our rights to flourish, the importance of wellbeing, and they get questioned quite

quickly when I'm working in an Asian context. And so that's been interesting in that we are very Western-centric. We definitely need more cross-cultural research.

A second criticism that I think is very valid is that we do tend to use very narrow methodologies. When the field was first established, the leaders put a very big emphasis on the need for quantitative methods and the need for really rigorous designs – so, randomised controlled trial [RCT] designs – and I think that was an important step to establish the credibility of the field because there's a tendency – because we're studying positively oriented constructs – for people to think that somehow “positive” is less rigorous or less scientific. So I think it was important that we did put emphasis on quantitative and RCTs to begin with, but I feel now it's time for the field to evolve and expand its notion of what we see as legitimate science and what we see as legitimate data.

To give you an example of that, I'm part of an editorial team and we're leading a special edition in the Journal of Positive Psychology next year [2016] on what we can learn about positive psychology through qualitative methods. Qualitative methods allow us to explore the lived experience of the individual within positive psychology. We definitely needed the quantitative emphasis to begin with; we definitely needed that to be able to generalize, but I think we're at a point now where we can address that criticism of narrow methodologies by starting to expand what methods we're using. I definitely think that qualitative research has a really big role to play in just giving us a different window into understanding the process of positive change.

I'm actually not an expert on qualitative methods. Kate Hefferon and I developed the idea for the special issue about four years ago. I was giving a lecture in her Masters of Applied Positive Psychology [MAPP] program at UEL [University of East London] and I'd collected some qualitative data. I was saying to her that this data is really important because it's shown me the duality of these positive constructs, but I'm not really familiar with the process to go about reporting this. Kate and I started talking about the lack of qualitative research that's occurring in the field. And so we put forward a symposium at the World Congress on Positive Psychology in LA a couple of years ago and that was accepted and was very well received. From there we decided to put forward a special edition to the Journal of Positive Psychology and that was accepted. What I've learned this year in being on the editorial team and reviewing all of these qualitative papers on positively oriented constructs is: qualitative methods have a lot to offer us in terms of our understanding of positive psychology. It will help us to identify those intricacies and

those nuances about what is optimal human development. The qualitative piece really brings that human voice to life in a way that statistics don't.

**You mentioned in your recent TEDx Talk that people in the academic and scholarly world, primarily in your previous field of organisational psychology, didn't take positive focused research and topics very seriously. Why do you think that is, first of all? And secondly, is there something that needs to happen for the field to get more respect?**

That was definitely my early experience. I'm pleased to report that things have changed a lot in the last five years. I think it was a function of the age of the field. It was just a natural part of the evolution of a very young field, that there were a lot of misunderstandings of what the field involved. As the field has developed, I'm seeing more and more credibility given to the field of positive psychology. I think that we owe a credit here to the early pioneers of the field, who really built a lot of the infrastructure: setting up our masters programs, setting up PhD level programs, setting up dedicated peer-reviewed journals like the Journal of Positive Psychology – and we now also have the new Springer Press Journal of Applied Positive Psychology – as well as setting up university centres, running conferences all around the world. They were very strategic and very wise to do that from the beginning because now I feel like that infrastructure is starting to come into its own. I think this is why we're now starting to see scholars from other fields view our field as a legitimate science that is governed by the same standards as their own field. I think the initial concern was that we weren't a legitimate science because they couldn't see evidence that we were governing ourselves in the same way, and that's because it takes a little while to build a field. Now that we have that infrastructure set in place, and it's very evident to people from other fields that we are studying it at the post-graduate level – we have dedicated peer-reviewed journal articles, we have scientific conferences and university centers – I think people are seeing it as a more credible field. Certainly for me in my own experience of those initial years where positive psychology was not seen as credible, that's not happening to me anymore. I hope that's the same for other people as well.

**Your new area is on strengths-based parenting. Can you tell us a little bit about this new field and idea of yours?**

I'm really excited about this field. As I said before, personally speaking, it was my pregnancy that brought me into the field of positive psychology in the first place. And I guess when I first started to reorient my research, because my PhD is in organisational psychology, I was applying more of the

science to what I knew, which was organisations. That, over time, morphed into the organisation of schools and positive education as I became a lot more interested in how we create social change through positive psychology. For me, a big role in that is the role of the institution of schools, but of course another big institution in society which would allow positive psychology to have an impact on social change is the institution of the family. When we look back on Seligman's presidential address, he deliberately and explicitly talks about how psychology needs to rearrange itself so we understand what creates flourishing families.

Then a couple of years later in the foundational paper with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, again they talk about the need to understand what creates thriving and flourishing parents and families. So it was always a bit of a puzzle to me that no one really seemed to take on that mantle within the field of positive psychology. I kept looking, hoping that we'd have someone who's already doing work on parenting research, or a developmental psychologist who would take on that call. No one has and it's almost two decades later. We've had two reviews of the field: Reuben Rusk's and mine in 2013, and then Stuart Donaldson and his team earlier this year, and both of those showed that this call to study positive psychology in parenting and in families hasn't been met yet.

I guess because of my own passion and applying it in my own family, I decided this needs to be one of my research programs. So what I've done over the past five years is to study the field of parenting. The field of parenting is very well established and has been around since the late 60s, and had another really big push in the 90s in terms of research. What I've started to look at is authoritative parenting – that's a style of positive parenting. It hasn't been looked at under the umbrella of positive psychology but there's no question that it's a style of positive parenting. I guess rather than invent the wheel on that, what I was interested in doing – because of my own interest in strengths-based science – is take what we already know about good parenting, which we've known now for 50 years – that good parents are authoritative, they're warm, they set firm boundaries for control – and add to it with a strength-based approach. I studied whether the parent is being strengths-oriented or deficit-based, and I set about answering that with a large group of teenagers, looking at whether strengths-based parenting, this new dimension, adds something above and beyond authoritative parenting, and it turns out that it does. In one study I found that when we ask teenagers to rate their parents on an authoritative scale – they set clear and firm boundaries, they're warm, etc.—that predicts about 16% of a teenager's life satisfaction. That's nothing new, as we've known that for a long time. What I also did in this study was to ask the

teenagers to report the degree to which their parents were strengths-based or not, and when I did that, and put it into the regression equation, it's a unique predictor. It predicts 19% of a teenager's life satisfaction. So what it's showing me is that we can take what we already know about good parenting from the parenting literature, which we've known for half a century, but we can add new ideas from positive psychology. When a teenager has a parent who is both authoritative and strengths-based, that significantly predicts their life satisfaction. I've done a series of studies since then which also show that teenagers who have parents who are strengths-based, there's a positive correlation between the teenager's own awareness of their strengths and their own use of their strengths.

Bumping it down to lower-aged kids, kids in upper primary school / elementary school, strengths-based parenting is significantly related to the way in which a child copes with stress. It's positively correlated with strengths-based coping; it's negatively correlated with levels of stress in those children as well. And guess what? Strengths-based parenting doesn't just have benefits for teenagers and kids, it also has benefits for the parents themselves. In my research, what I've found is that parents who take a strengths-based approach report higher levels of life satisfaction. In a four-week quasi-experimental waitlist intervention study I did with the parents, at the end of the intervention the parents who went through the strengths-based program reported higher levels of positive emotion and higher levels of a sense of efficacy as a parent. Do you want me to continue or is that enough?

**It sounds interesting, that whole area, I'm keen to know more about it.**

I'm really excited about it. I feel it's been a gap in the field for a long time and it's an important gap to address. If positive psychology is to achieve its aim of achieving social change, then we need to work through the existing institutions, and family is a key one. Right now I'm writing up all my findings in my book *The Strong Child*. It's my first trade book and it's been a great experience for me to write the book, to write about science but in a more conversational way.

**You're also known for your work in the area of positive education. What would you say is your vision for that field? What do you think positive education's greatest accomplishments are so far?**

In terms of our accomplishments, we really have a lot to be proud of in that field. Positive education is always well represented on the scientific programs at various positive psychology conferences. There's a lot of high-quality research that's occurring from the field and occurring across many different

countries. That's also probably a field where we're less Western-centric than some of the other subfields of positive psychology. We've seen the advent of associations like International Positive Education Network, Positive Education Schools Association – these are great signs of growth in the field. I also think we've done a really good job in translating science to practice, and connecting with teacher's in schools, so it hasn't just been an ivory tower research endeavour. In that regard, I feel we've accomplished a lot; we've got a lot to be proud of.

In terms of my vision, I have a dual vision, I think, for the field, operating at two very different levels. The first part of my vision is that we need to be operating more at a policy level. We need to be making sure our research is being seen and incorporated by educational policy experts so we get that kind of top-down drive for priority and resources being devoted to wellbeing in schools. At the other level of my dual vision, we should be aiming to have a much wider and much deeper impact at the chalkface itself. I think the field of positive education has gained a lot of traction, but despite this progress, I feel that the promise of positive education is falling short of what we could do. That's because not all schools are taking up positive education programs. Even with the schools that do take up positive education programs, the programs are only adopted by certain teachers, only in certain year levels. So even though our science is good, I don't think we could put our hand on our heart and genuinely say we're having a wide impact at this stage.

I've thought about that a lot because my interest is in having a wide impact, but I think we may have unwittingly limited our progress in positive education by putting our focus on wellbeing programs at the expense of teacher practice. What I mean by that is that wellbeing programs are great, they are much easier for researchers to evaluate because they have curriculums, they're bounded in time, and we have certain groups that go in and out of those programs. But, as I said before, not all schools take up the programs, and even the schools that we know that do, not all students within that school get access to that program. So I think we're really only going to have wide-scale impact in the field if we start to infuse positive education into standard teacher practice. So, that is to extend our focus beyond our programs and into practice, where the very act of teaching itself occurs in a way that builds the wellbeing of a student. This is when positive education will reach its full potential. From a positive education research perspective, what that says to me is that we need to start tackling pedagogy. Not just building and evaluating wellbeing programs and curriculums, we need to work with teachers to find a way so that when they teach in the classroom—whether they're teaching physics, psychology,

physical education, history, geography—whatever they're teaching, that the very way in which they teach builds the wellbeing of a student. So that's where I think we need to head to. My vision is that positive education has equal emphasis on pedagogy as well as curriculum.

I also want to say a third thing: is that we need to do more to honour and connect with other movements that are strongly aligned with what we're doing, like social-emotional learning, resilience education, mindfulness education and positive youth development. I think because we're a new field and we're trying to carve out our own space, we haven't turned as much to those aligned fields as we could. I would like us to form much stronger connections with those related wellbeing-education fields.

### **Is there someone in the field that you look up to, and why?**

I chose Jane Dutton. For me, again, she's like the living embodiment of the field. She gives us a real life example of person who is positive in her outlook and because of that has been highly productive. She's a co-founder of the field of positive organisational scholarship. That's pretty amazing to be a person who has founded a field. My PhD was in organisational psychology, so I have an affinity with Jane. I really admire the way she builds capabilities and strengths in employees in organisations, and in the field of management Jane really was an early adopter of those positive topics. She was studying resilience in organisations, she was studying compassion in organisations. Of course, she was the originator of high-quality connections, so I really admire her research. I use her research a lot in my own teaching and consulting.

I think another reason I look up to her is because she's cross-disciplinary. She straddles management, organisational psychology and positive psychology, and I think it's harder when you're cross-disciplinary because you haven't set up camp in one specific area, and that makes things harder in terms of which journal do you publish in? If you've studied compassion in the workplace, do you go for an organisational psychology journal or do you go for a positive psychology journal? My own experience as someone who has straddled across disciplines is that it can sometimes leave you in no man's land. You go for positive journals and they're like, "This isn't positive enough," and you go for organisational journals and they say, "This isn't organisational enough". And yet, she's managed to do that. She's so well regarded in the field of management and organisational psychology, she's received the top academic prize from the Academy of Management in the United States of America. So I admire that

because even though it's harder to be cross-disciplinary, we need people like that because they're the ones who push out the boundaries of the field. I also just admire her as a person; she's really humble, she operates from a really deep sense of purpose, and these are qualities that I admire in a person. On top of all of that, she's just a really genuine and nice person. I always leave my conversations with her feeling cared for and recharged.

**While we're on the topic of one exceptional woman in the field – Jane Dutton – as I mentioned earlier this volume of the book is devoted to all exceptional women in the field. Do you have any thoughts about the gender balance in positive psychology or in the contribution that women have made in advancing the field?**

The first thing I want to say is thank you for devoting this edition to women. I think it's an important recognition of the role of women in building the field. Certainly there have been many luminaries in the field who are women – I'm talking the likes of Barb Fredrickson, Jane Dutton, Laura King, Sonja Lyubomirsky, Shelly Gable and so on. I'm really interested to see the second wave of women who are coming through the field and are having an impact. I'm fascinated by the work of Amy Wrzesniewski, Theresa Glomb and Sara Algoe in the US. Kate Hefferon and Claudia Harzer in the UK-Europe are doing great work. In my own centre I'm totally hooked on the research of Dianne Vella-Brodrick and Peggy Kern. And Shiri Lavy and Hadassah Litman's stuff on strengths coming out of Israel is really interesting. That's just to name a few. These are good quality scientists who are shaping our field, and there's lots of women who are doing this.

I'm not sure about the gender balance. I guess one specific comment I have is that I'd like to see more women keynote speakers – at the world congress and the European congress – and more female representation at the higher levels of boards and associations. Overall I'm really proud of the role that women have played in building this field.

**Okay last question, so imagine 15 years into the future, what do you think is the future for positive psychology as a field, and is this different to where you expect it to be in 15 years?**

I think positive psychology has significant potential to create significant social change. For me especially, it's through the strengths-based paradigm. For that reason I really feel that we should be aiming towards having a more concrete effect on policy: policy at global, national and local levels. But this is a

difficult challenge because we're psychologists, and so our specialty is human nature. We're not experts on the policy process, but this is where I think I imagine our future. This is where I would like to see us heading as a field. That begs the question of "how?" How do we be sure that in 15 years' time we're influencing policy more strongly? I certainly don't have all of the answers for that, but I do see three ways that will help move us forward. First is that we can work towards this goal of connecting more strongly with researchers in fields like public health, in business, in economics. What we know is that each of these fields have proven themselves to be successful in influencing policy, so we can learn a lot from those fields, but also if we connect with them I think we can have some synergistic gains, because positive psychology does have something to say in public health, it does have something to say in business. We could definitely find some ways of influencing economics, for example, the New Economics Foundation. So the first thing I'd say is that we need to hook up with these kinds of fields and create those synergistic effects, those "hooking up" effects, and just learn from those fields, because, in my opinion, they have been fields that have successfully influenced policy where psychologists have fallen short.

The second thing we need to do is to connect up with well-known bodies and policies at the global level that are prioritizing wellbeing. Thankfully for us, it's our time. You've got the World Health Organisation's Ottawa Charter; OECD's Better Life Index, which is measuring population wellbeing at the intergovernmental level; the Council of Europe has enshrined wellbeing as a universal human right into the social charter. So these are the kind of global initiatives that I think we've got something to say or add to.

We see lots of this happening now at the national or country level. The UK now has its national wellbeing program. Bhutan, of course, has its Gross National Happiness Index. New Zealand has a mental health commission that's established a mental health plan, and is now measuring national wellbeing through their Sovereign Wellbeing Index. Even in our own country, Australia, the federal government has listed mental health as one of nine national governmental priorities. We're using schools as institutions in our society to build wellbeing into our new national curriculum, which states that all teachers now need to teach in a way that boosts the social-emotional development of their students. So certainly, positive psychology researchers in those particular countries can use the policies and the national interest as a way of getting themselves to the policy table.

The third thing I say is that as a field, we need to develop a better understanding of the policy cycle. We need to develop a better understanding of how policy is developed, and the criteria that policy makers use when they're deciding what research will inform their policies. We know that policy makers prefer large, representative samples, and I'm not sure how good positive psychology is at doing that at the moment. We tend to use smaller samples; a lot of our research is still at that "pilot" phase. We know that policy makers want interventions that have been designed that can be easily administered at scale, and so we need to be thinking about that. When we're sitting down as researchers to design a positive psychology intervention – of course we need to be thinking about the scientific requirements – but we also need to be thinking about the policy requirements, designing our research in a way that suits the policy criteria. The other thing is, policy makers really like case studies and are really interested in how context shapes policy. For example, the educational policy you have in a disadvantaged school area is different to the way you would implement it in a more advantaged school area. I think at the moment we're not so good at that, we're not good at using case studies and context, and so that would be something that I would like to see us get better at over the next 15 years. The thing about policy is that it occurs in real time and real life. It doesn't occur in a lab setting. What that means is that there's a huge number of variables that policy makers need to take into account.

The other thing to think about is that policy makers never get a clean slate. They never start with: here's education or here's the environment or here's women's issues; it's completely neutral right now, and you can create a policy that will create change. As researchers, we in positive psychology need to be incorporating more in terms of our moderators, mediators and context so that we can speak the language of a policy maker. The policy process is much faster than the process of publishing positive psychology research, and this does create a tension for us and presents a challenge. But one way I see us getting around this, at this stage of the field, is to place more emphasis on big reviews of the field, and provide those reviews to policy makers. We're in an important time in the evolution of our field. It's almost two decades old and I think it's almost timely for us to step back and review what we've learnt. Techniques like meta-analyses, like the bibliometric analysis that Reuben [Rusk] and I did a couple of years ago, we can take those big reviews to the policy makers and then we're sort of speaking their language a little bit more.

## Amy Wrzesniewski

Amy Wrzesniewski is a professor of organizational behavior at the Yale School of Management, Yale University. Her research explores how people make meaning of their work, with a focus on the impact meaning has on employees and the organizations in which they work. These meanings have implications for how employees shape their tasks, interactions and relationships with others in the workplace to change the meaning of the job. Amy earned her BA from the University of Pennsylvania, where she graduated magna cum laude with an honors degree in psychology. She received her PhD in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan. Her research on the meaning of work has been published in a wide range of top academic journals and highlighted in several best-selling books and popular press outlets, including Forbes, Time, BusinessWeek, Harvard Business Review, US News and World Report and The Economist, as well as bestselling books such as Drive by Daniel Pink, The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor, Authentic Happiness by Martin Seligman and The Art of Happiness by the Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler.

### **What are the defining features of positive psychology for you?**

For me, the focus that is most meaningful about it is in some sense a focus on what is *possible* – in individual life, in individual experience, in group and organizational processes and outcomes. Rather than being focused on a particular phenomenology of things, for me it's about the focus on where things are going right and well – within individual, group and organizational and institutional systems – which has traditionally not, as you know, been our focus. It's been more a focus on where things have fallen apart, or are not thriving. And so it's a deliberate focus on the other side. That said, I'm a big believer that you can't have a focus on positive psychology without a focus on the full sweep of human experience and behavior, because the one doesn't really make sense without the context of the other.

### **What about your work in the area of positive psychology? Can you tell me a little bit about your work in the field?**

Sure, I've been involved throughout my research career in questions of meaning – of how it is that people make meaning of their work, of how it is that people make very different kinds of meaning of the same work, why different kinds of meanings occur, and what are the implications for individuals

and the organizations they're a part of, and why they matter. This has grown into a focus on how it is that individuals shape aspects of their jobs so that they can derive the kinds of meanings they most want from their work, meanings which previously may have been assumed to be the property of the job itself. So that's been the kind of work that I do.

In positive psychology in particular, I study the full sweep of the experience of meaning in work. But it has been one kind of meaning—the experience of work as a “calling”—that first brought the research I do to the attention of the people within the positive psychology tent, if you will. But I'm interested in all the different kinds of ways in which work has different kinds of meanings associated with it.

### **How is it that you became interested in that field?**

I had always been interested in this topic. I had decided when I was about 16 that I wanted to study the psychology of work, or industrial-organizational psychology. I grew up just outside of Philadelphia and knew that Penn had a good psychology department and that I could also take electives at the Wharton School of Business on topics related to work and organizational life. So I made the decision to go there, assuming that I could learn how to do research in this area. This was partially a product of me not really knowing how university systems worked, being a first generation college student. So I get to Penn and the person who they had have come every other year to teach industrial-organizational psychology had just been fired.

So I thought, “Research is research and so getting trained up on lab methods and survey methods and so on will be an important thing,” and I actually started working with Marty Seligman as a work study student in my freshman year. It was in that year that Paul Rozin—who was another leader in that department—and I started to work together, and then he and I continued to work together for the rest of my time at Penn and then beyond.

Paul is an amazing human being, who, though he wasn't working on anything to do with work or people's experience of work, trained me in research and then was open to me doing my honors thesis in this area. And so he composed a committee of himself, Rick McCauley from Bryn Mawr College and Barry Schwartz from Swarthmore College, to work with me on these topics, which none of them

necessarily studied directly but all of them found interesting. It was out of that collaboration that the first paper in this area came. My initial frame around research was a lot of evaluative conditioning work looking at how people come to like or dislike things, particularly cross-modality using a lot of different learning schedules, if you will. In some sense it was not that far of a leap to think about work in the same way, that the same work can be a very positive or a very negative stimulus for different people. How is it that that comes to be the case? What does that look like? And so on. So it was in the collaboration that we ended up coming up with the frame that ultimately went forward from there.

### **What would you say your proudest moment is in the field so far?**

This is a great question and I think I have two. One is a moment and one is not. The one that's not is that studying these questions around work and meaning and framings of work and so on, in the field that I am in — industrial-organizational psychology — this was not a hot topic when I arrived at graduate school. In fact, I was encouraged by the faculty to leave this work behind and go do something that was maybe a bit more mainstream than that area. I did not follow that advice, clearly, and managed to forge a way forward in the kind of work that I was doing. One of the moments that has really been quite positive — I don't know if "proud" is the right word — is just how much attention, even just over this past decade, a lot of these topics and questions have been getting, in the popular press, in academia more generally, and just out in the world and public interest. And so that's somewhat bewildering but also exciting.

Then the proudest discrete moment would have been back in, I believe 2000, I was giving a talk at the positive psychology summit held in Washington DC. This was the same summit, I believe, where James Pawelski first met Marty Seligman. I was there in the session where James, back then with his long ponytail, stood up and asked Marty a very challenging question about the relationship of positive psychology to philosophy. That was the beginning of their relationship and collaboration; it's just been amazing to watch what that has created. I gave a talk in that summit and at the time was a very junior assistant professor who had just started post-PhD, and I was on a panel about work with two people who were full-chaired professors at the absolute height of their careers and influence. I was feeling very much like a fish out of water, and so I prepared like crazy for this talk. It went quite well, which I was very pleased with because I'm not a comfortable talk-giver, and as I walked back to my seat after my talk, Danny Kahneman reaches out from his aisle seat and says to me, "That was a great talk". It's related

to positive psychology because I was at the summit when it happened, but it's probably one of the best moments of my career. (Laughs).

**That would be quite pleasing I imagine! Danny Kahneman, wow! I now have some questions about the limitations of the field. The first one is, what do you feel are some of the gaps that are in positive psychology at the moment that perhaps need plugging?**

In my own teaching, whether it's directly about these topics or not, often the things that the students are more interested in hearing about are topics that have a lot to do with positive psychology, in particular, issues or questions around resilience, identity and things like this. In those areas I wish we knew more, I wish that there was more intervention research that I could give them that would help inform their paths forward, and how it is that they can interpret their experiences thus far. So for me, those are the two: resilience and identity, where obviously there's been lots of work happening but where I feel like there's even more to do.

**You mentioned earlier that you were encouraged early on in your career to leave your work behind and adopt a more mainstream research topic. This was a similar theme to one of the discussions at the recent positive organizational scholarship (POS) conference in Florida, where some people raised the issue that they almost felt a stigma about positively oriented research. I got the impression there was a perceived pressure to disguise one's research under a more mainstream organizational psychology umbrella. Why do you think there is this skepticism or potential stigma about positive-focused research areas and do you think there is something stopping positive psychology or POS being accepted as perhaps a more legitimate area of psychology or management science?**

Both great questions. One thing I can say is I never disguised the type of research I was doing, which I think actually may have led to a longer path to certain career milestones in my case. But that was fine by me because I was just doing the work that I wanted to do, and for me, frankly, I think that the fact I was doing this work before Marty spearheaded this effort to begin positive psychology was actually a good thing because I was studying again the full range of the human experience of meaning in work, as opposed to studying one type of meaning – which I think would have been necessarily incomplete. In that way, I feel a bit like the positive psychologists discovered me and the work that I was doing, rather than me studying them and shaping my work around that. Honestly, I do think that that is something that makes a difference, and I advise graduate students quite a bit that if you are interested in a process

or a dynamic relationship between variables or whatever it may be, you really do need to understand it in its fullness. If some of the variables are positive, then wonderful, but there can be a cost in terms of your fuller understanding of these questions if you limit the way in which you ask them or limit the types of questions you ask. I do think that, whether it is fair or not, there is a perception that work which is positive in nature may be perceived to be lacking in the understanding of the full set of dynamics around that process. And that may be part of the issue.

There's a difference between saying that you're someone who studies "human thriving in groups" versus saying you're someone who studies how the initial conditions and processes in place in groups, such as decision-making processes, collaboration processes etc. lead groups to such different outcomes. In the first case it looks like you are in some sense segmenting the range, as opposed to really trying to understand in general what allows groups to function in the way that they do. In both cases you can be just as interested in the former, and perhaps only interested in the former. But I think studying it in the form of the latter and talking about it in the form of the latter, when it's appropriate to do so, is wise.

**Great answer. What do you think of the current gender balance across the field of positive psychology and / or the leadership of the field?**

This is the question that I think stumped me the most, because I don't know that I know that much about what the gender distribution is in the field. Anytime I think about it, I'm not thinking of the size or the distribution of the denominator, I'm thinking of people who I know whose work has been highlighted in that sector, any number of really well-regarded women. But it may just be that that's what's salient to me and that it's a drop in the ocean compared to the number of men. So it's something that not only am I unsure of, but it made me realize that I should know more about this.

**That's alright! Have you used any of the positive psychology general research or research related to POS for your own wellbeing or engagement?**

Probably the work that I've drawn on the most is, honestly, Daniel Gilbert's work on "affective forecasting". The findings on how positive or negative outcomes that happen in the future are forecasted more dramatically and are typically not as dramatic in their actual impact, has helped me a

great deal, as I have gone after some pretty big goals that were difficult to reach and potentially unlikely that I'd reach. I think I was more willing to take those risks realizing that even if this doesn't work out, this research tells me that ultimately I will be okay (laughs). And more okay than I would think right now as I project into the future and think about what it will feel like to, for example, not have this project work out, or not get tenure, or not have any number of other things happen.

**Do you feel that people who study positive psychology are more or less happy than the general population?**

I love this question, and it led to a lot of entertaining thoughts on my part. I wonder if it's bi-modal. If it's a bi-modal distribution there may be people who are happier and are more just oriented towards the positive and wanting to understand the positive, and there might also be a camp who are the opposite and therefore looking to understand something that they don't have a good grasp on. I say this because there's a joke (I'm sure you've heard this as well) but "people study their own dysfunction" – the thing that they cannot understand or get their heads around. Knowing a number of the folks who are in this field, I think that some of them are interested in studying these things to get a better understanding of how they work, because they are not necessarily a part of their own personal experience. I've encountered a lot of people who've been so focused on the positive in their own lives, and are so happy, high positive affect, stable, that they want to understand what it is that would prevent other individuals or systems from having these experiences, and they want to pull apart why this is. My money would go on a bi-modal distribution.

**What would you say is an area of positive psychology, so either research or practice, to look out for in the future?**

Though I'm not a brain researcher or a neuroscientist, one of the things that I'm interested in is intervention research. In particular, I would expect that we will be seeing more evidence, and more good evidence, of interventions that have their effect at the level of the brain in terms of changing structures over time. There's already some work on this around meditation and so on, but to look to see how it is that we can leverage some of this knowledge that we have in ways that have measurable impact at that level. I think this will probably be some of the more important work to come out of this area going forward.

**So your work in particular: you're well known for your work in positive organizational scholarship and in particular orientations to work, job crafting, and so on. Has there been much of an interest in your research from people working in industry – practitioners, professionals – in taking it up and using it?**

There has been and this has delighted me and in some sense surprised me. Though, given I am studying an applied area, or an applied domain of life, I'm realizing it probably shouldn't have surprised me, particularly in organizations where people are keeping up with what's happening on the research side. There's a lot of interest in describing what it is that I'm finding, coming in and doing field experiments, interventions and studies, practices that have been implemented on the basis of work – which is again incredibly gratifying. I went into this because I was interested in pulling apart the puzzles and trying to understand the puzzles of this, and the fact that some of the answers may be helpful in real time in terms of how it is affecting management practice is terrific.

**Do you have any advice for other people to help their ideas have more traction?**

So more traction from the point of view of out in the world?

**So people using it and applying it, rather than it just sitting in the academic world, I guess.**

My answer runs the risk of sounding a little flip and I don't mean for it to. But I think if you start with questions that really matter in the world and about which you have a really deep curiosity in understanding, it is no guarantee that it will ever make its way into the public consciousness. But it is more likely to than to just choose questions that hit the latter but not the former. I'm revealing some of my bias here in that I do feel as though the research questions that are most worthy of studying are those that do matter for the world, for understanding processes or outcomes which shape things that matter in human lives, or in groups or societies. The rest may be a source of abundant curiosity, but I'm a fan of the intersection of the two. Even then, I feel like the kinds of questions that I study — how is it that people make meaning of this domain of life in ways that really affect what will happen to them and the systems they're a part of — is one of those questions in my own opinion that matters quite a bit and about which I have a lot of curiosity. That said, it was a very long time before this work began to get picked up in the mainstream. It surprised me when it happened because it wasn't something that I was trying to make happen, but it can take a very long time. So I think if it's the goal of a researcher to have that be what happens, that's very different from being a researcher who is a researcher but who

is studying things that may end up floating into the mainstream because the answers matter. Does that make sense?

**It does make sense, absolutely. It sounds as though it happened organically and naturally for you.**

Yes, which has made it all a bit overwhelming and hard to wrap my head around. (Laughs).

**Okay, last question. Is there anything you would like to comment on that I have not asked about?**

My understanding again from the volumes and from our conversation is that this is going out to a wide group of people, many of them students and researchers who are interested in this area?

**Yes, that's right.**

It's not a question but the only other comment that I would add is just what a large community of people there are, both scholars and practitioners, who care deeply about this and who care deeply about research and science that's done well. This community can inform areas that haven't had the attention that they've needed because we've never been in a period like this. They need to know that, and to trust that, wherever they might be, scattered all over the world, as they pursue these questions.

## Suzy Green

Suzy Green (D.Psyc.Clin.) is a clinical and coaching psychologist (MAPS) and the founder of The Positivity Institute, an organisation dedicated to the research and application of positive psychology for life, school and work. Suzy is a leader in the complementary fields of coaching psychology and positive psychology, having conducted a world-first study on evidence-based coaching as an applied positive psychology. Suzy was the recipient of an International Positive Psychology Fellowship Award and is widely published. Suzy lectured on applied positive psychology as a senior adjunct lecturer in the Coaching Psychology Unit, University of Sydney for ten years and is an honorary vice president of the International Society for Coaching Psychology. Suzy also currently holds honorary academic positions at the School of Business, Western Sydney University; School of Business, University of Wollongong; Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne; Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE), Australian Catholic University and the Black Dog Institute, and is an affiliate of the Institute for Well-Being, Cambridge University. Suzy has a strong media profile, appearing regularly on television, radio and in print.

### **In general terms and from your point of view, what are some of the defining features of positive psychology?**

As a clinical psychologist, my training was primarily in diagnosis, with a focus on illness reduction and treatment of symptoms. For me, positive psychology is not so much about symptom reduction, but the opportunity to look at the person's whole life, and how their symptoms of languishing, or being "moderately mentally healthy" may be a reflection of not living a truly authentic life, a life that has had the opportunity to reflect on "who I am" and "how I am going to live my life". For me, positive psychology is a much broader approach to positive mental health and wellbeing, with a focus on understanding "who I am" and "how I am living my life to live a flourishing life". There is definitely a place for clinical treatment, there is no doubt about that, and as a registered clinical psychologist, I'm required to provide the most evidence-based treatment available at the time. I have, however, always been open to newer approaches, but it is a legal requirement that we use the most evidence-based treatment. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), with its increased evidence base is now almost on par with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), thank goodness, as for me it is more of a "positive psychology" aligned clinical approach. Things will change in psychology over time, but it's been very

slow, particularly in the clinical realm. There are some publications coming out now around positive psychiatry and positive clinical psychology, and those that I work with who are clinical psychs are much more in the mindset of positive psychology, coaching psychology and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-based approaches, although ten years on from my clinical doctorate, things haven't moved as quickly as I would have liked them to in clinical psych.

**What area of positive psychology would you say is your specialty area, or that you know a lot about?**

Most of my presentations and writing have been on the integration of coaching psychology and positive psychology. In my mind, they're "best friends," and it's good to see that this is starting to happen. Professor Stephen Palmer, a leader in the field of coaching psychology based in the UK, and I have a book with Routledge coming out later this year that focuses specifically on positive psychology in relation to coaching, and the integration with coaching, and it will cover topics such as ACT, neuroscience and mindfulness. "Positive education," in my view, needs to better incorporate positive psychology and coaching psychology. Whilst I do lots of writing and presentations on this topic, I'm becoming more known as an "implementer" in putting this into action in school settings. Historically it's been schools who have embraced applied positive psychology but now it's also organisations.

**What do you like more: teaching classes on positive psychology, researching positive psychology, or coaching positive psychology?**

I lectured for ten years at the University of Sydney and now hold a number of honorary positions at universities, so I only do guest lectures now and then. In the past I've conducted four RCTs [randomised controlled trials] on coaching as an applied positive psychology and I'm hoping to start a new research project this year. I'm doing less one-on-one coaching these days, spending more and more time on expert consulting, engaging with a number of schools and organisations.

**Are there any key events that changed the course of your career into moving towards positive psychology?**

The defining event for me was when I'd just started the clinical masters in 2001. Associate Professor Lindsay Oades was my supervisor, and I was working at a psychiatric clinic as an intern psychologist. We were going to initially do research related to schizophrenia. However, there was a talk by the local Australian Psychological Society on "life coaching" and I went along because I thought, "This is

interesting stuff". Lindsay was there too, and I asked him what he was doing there and he said, "We use this approach with people with chronic mental illness" in terms of promoting their psychological wellbeing. Out of that event my whole life trajectory starting moving in a different way. I began to realise that coaching could be used as a mental health prevention intervention and my whole doctoral research changed to this topic, with Lindsay's support. Positive psychology and coaching psych were launched at a similar time, so I really was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time. Also, being the Director of the First Australian Positive Psychology in Education symposium in Sydney in 2009 was a major turning point. (Geelong Grammar School had only brought Marty out in 2008.) We had Mathew White as a key note speaker, and 200 people rolling their eyes, with many saying this is a "fad" and only for the rich schools. But now, in 2016, look at what's going on in positive education globally.

**In your coaching / positive psychology work, what are the things you think work best?**

Mindfulness definitely, which Professor Felicia Huppert calls the "foundation of flourishing". For me, if you haven't got a level of mindfulness, how are you going to mindfully think to use strengths? How are you going to apply any positive psychology intervention if you haven't got a level of mindfulness? For me, mindfulness is definitely the foundation of flourishing and I am excited to see the ongoing research and it's uptake in schools.

Gratitude also, as one of the most researched areas, and one of the most simple but most powerful interventions; but obviously it has to be done in a heartfelt way and can't just be having to simply and potentially "mindlessly" write five new things down on my gratitude list. My students over the ten years were required to conduct positive psychology interventions on themselves, and those that stood out, that the students were surprised by, were mindfulness. They initially thought, "This is going to be easy". It wasn't even that the students noticed the difference in themselves; it was others that noticed the difference. For me, mindfulness and gratitude are the "big guns of wellbeing," and it's good to see some links coming through connecting them to physical health also.

Finally, forgiveness. I still remember the powerful stories in students' reflections – building relationships and reaching out to family members and the powerful effect that forgiveness interventions can have.

**What do you think is the field of positive psychology's BHAG (Big Harry Audacious Goal) – to borrow one of your terms?**

World domination! Being able to influence policy globally. In Australia the positive education schools association [PESA] is also now connected with IPEN [International Positive Education Network] so we should start to see some significant changes happening in the education sector in regard to wellbeing.

**What's your BHAG for positive psychology?**

I like to refer to the Huppert & So [2009] bell curve of flourishing, and schools and workplaces are two big key institutions that can potentially shift the bell curve towards flourishing. I'm passionate about the South Australian project where the state has committed to become the wellbeing state of the world, and I love the concept of "activating hubs of community wellbeing" with schools at the centre.

**Who do you look up to in the field?**

Professor Felicia Huppert, who is an amazing thought leader in the field but the most modest person. Professor Barbara Fredrickson also as a pioneer in the study of positive emotions. I was very fortunate to attend the Positive Organisations Research Symposium the day before the last world congress and I sat at Barb's table and met a range of female researchers in positive emotion in organisations. David Cooperrider also, is one of the most inspirational people I have met. It's exciting to see positive psychology, POS [Positive Organisational Scholarship], AI [Appreciative Inquiry] and coaching coming together.

**Your most proud moment in the field?**

Having seen where Pos Ed has come to since that original conference in 2009, and being part of a group of people that have helped get it off the ground, particularly here in Australia. Also when I finished ten years of teaching at Sydney University, the coaching and mentoring alumni asked if I would come and speak. Tony [Grant] came and a lot of students were there, and I was given a certificate of appreciation. I've met the most incredible people through the course at Sydney University, and to see the impact it has, it touches so many lives, and the students have taken their learnings and gone out and are changing the world! It's incredible.

**Positive psychology is being applied in health, education, the army, in therapy; where next? What's unexplored?**

Early childhood! Surprisingly, not much has been done in this sector. I've been playing in the higher education space also – I see so much opportunity there. At Western Sydney [University] we have been training the staff for the past three years in a positive psychology program. There are also universities creating in-house wellbeing positions as we speak.

**Yes, the wave of Positive Universities is coming...**

That's right.

## Laura Morgan Roberts

Laura Morgan Roberts is Professor of Psychology, Culture and Organization Studies at Antioch University, USA. As an educator, researcher and consultant, Dr Roberts is the co-founder and CEO of R-PAQ Solutions, Inc., an Atlanta-based research and consulting firm that brings strength-based practices to leaders who seek extraordinary performance and personal fulfillment. As a professor of organizational behaviour, Dr Roberts has served on the faculties of the Harvard Business School, University of Michigan; Wharton School, Simmons School of Management, Georgia State University; and AVT Business School in Denmark. Dr Roberts is an architect of personal and professional alignment, who helps leaders to unlock the pathways for constructing, sustaining and restoring positive identities at work. A native of Gary, Indiana, Dr Roberts earned her BA in psychology with highest distinction and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Virginia. She then received her MA and PhD in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan.

### **Can you just tell us a bit about how you got interested in positive organizational scholarship?**

Sure. I've always been interested in helping individuals to cultivate more fulfilling work lives. I recognized early in life that identity is central to work fulfillment, because how we think about ourselves and others profoundly shapes our beliefs about what's possible for our careers and lives generally. I grew up in a community in which I was surrounded by the ongoing tensions between hope, which comes from the strength of identity, and hopelessness, associated with some external forces like a waning economy, stigmatization, etc. So, I wanted to be somebody who could tap into the sense of personal agency and belief that the resources that reside within us are the conduits for generating fulfillment; the belief that fulfillment doesn't come from accomplishments and attainments of external validation, but from an inward belief and confidence that our own existence is meaningful and valuable, and that each individual has the extraordinary potential to make a life-changing difference.

While I was in graduate school, I worked with faculty mentors who scientifically explored the impact of positive identities for work experiences and overall wellbeing. I attended graduate school at the University of Michigan, in the organizational psychology PhD program, where I worked with faculty both in the psychology department as well as in business school. While I was there, I began pursuing research

projects that would allow me to learn more about how people from various walks of life cultivate more positive identities at work. Since then, I've continued in this vein, examining mechanisms of identity claiming and granting processes, such as, the role of structured and spontaneous affirmation in cultivating more positive identities; the power of personal narratives for cultivating more positive identities; and also some of the strategic self-disclosure, impression management and, authentic engagement choices that individuals make for the sake of cultivating more positive identities at work and beyond.

I was a graduate student at the University of Michigan in 2000-2001, during the time in which I would say the "modern movement" of positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship was catalyzed. I was fortunate to be in the midst of discussions with several of the faculty who have been leading scholars in this work, as they began to offer a critical perspective on what we knew about individual and organizational flourishing, and what was meaningful and worthwhile with respect to our scholarship in these areas. So I got pulled into a couple of research projects that were closely connected to these burgeoning questions around Positive Organizational Scholarship [POS]. Specifically, the work on the reflected best self and positive identities which I began during that time has continued to carry me down the path of inquiry, and has kept me connected with positive organizational scholarship approaches to my research.

**You've been in the field for quite a while now and I'm sure you've had a lot of opportunities to interact with a range of different people. Is there any particular person within the field that you look up to?**

People that I look up to... so you get in trouble when you start naming names, right? (Laughs). But connected with the previous question that you just asked, I've had the benefit of working with individuals that I've considered to be on the vanguard of this modern POS movement. I have tremendous respect and admiration for them because I was a student – and then a colleague – while their trajectories became more intensely focused on shining light on what's right, so to speak, in people and in organizations. I was there [at the University of Michigan] at a critical juncture; I saw where research trajectories were heading previously in psychology and organizational studies, and I've seen how they shifted when these scholars took a decided turn toward building up momentum around POS.

Those who I admire include: Jane Dutton, Bob Quinn, Gretchen Spreitzer, Lynn Wooten, Kim Cameron... I was a grad student at Michigan when Barb Fredrickson was there; I didn't work directly with her, but I was very familiar with and inspired by her work and continue to be so. I was deeply inspired by the late Chris Peterson; I had the pleasure of being able to connect with him as a part of the psychology community when he was working closely with Seligman on character strengths and virtues. There are also many psychologists who are leading scholars of race and social identity, including Robert Sellers, Stella Nkomo, Ella Bell, David Thomas, Robin Ely and Jacqueline Mattis, who have also been central to my own research. In recent years I've been integrating the POS work with the diversity inclusion work that I've done, which has been inspired by these researchers.

I'm now a faculty member of Antioch University's interdisciplinary PhD program in Leadership and Change. Within our program we share an emphasis on promoting social justice through leading change in organizations and communities. I'm deeply inspired by many of my students who are practitioners on the ground doing this work, taking these ideas and putting them into practice, and then also using their own work as a live-in laboratory to discover new insights. Several of my colleagues, including our program co-founders Alan Guskin and Laurien Alexandre, have really been on the vanguard of advancing the tenets of POS and positive psychology in the global community sphere (though they may not identify themselves as "POS" researchers). But I would say, in general, I've been most inspired by those scholars who have really stepped out there as game-changers for the ways that we think about individual and organizational flourishing, and have provoked us to start asking difficult questions, to really get at the core of sources of strength for individuals and organizations.

**Related to that point, from your perspective, what do you see as some of the defining features of positive organizational scholarship?**

I'll highlight three defining features. The first is "strength-based," meaning the emphasis on strengths and strengthening, what are the core strengths that exist within individuals and organizations, and what are the processes for strengthening individuals and organizations? The second is the innovative embrace of a wide range of research methods and contexts. There's a true openness toward research, such that the question should guide the method of inquiry, and the field should not discount certain contexts that superficially may seem to be less relevant or less central to typical management questions. For instance, a few years ago, Bunderson and Thompson's [2009] study of calling among zoo

keepers was selected as the POS published article of the year. That's just one example which has encouraged me over the years to really focus on positive organizing, and not to get stuck in formulaic approaches or templates toward studying groups and contexts that, on the surface, would seem to be more "traditional" from a management or psychology perspective.

The third core feature would be the curiosity about possibility over probability. Bob Quinn and I have talked about this over the years, and POS scholars have written about this in connected conversations, such as those about positive deviance. Think about what positive deviance represents: it represents the statistical outlier. In a standard formulaic approach toward inquiry and practice, your goal is to determine and predict what would *most likely* happen or what may be the *most typical* experience. But POS offers a rigorous and structured approach to examining what is *atypical*, and learning from it as a way of discovering *what's possible* in individual and organizational life. Even if the typical result occurs nine times out of ten, there is another dimension, a higher state, a higher level of functioning that has been experienced and achieved within certain individuals and within certain organizations (e.g. the top 10%). Therefore, *what's possible* is as legitimate as what might be considered the more typical, normative or probable approach and experience. POS invites us to consider how we, as scholars and / or practitioners, can seek to construct or co-create more experiences where what now is a departure or a deviation from the norm can, at the very least, become the standard to which everyone aspires.

### **What do you think one major challenge is that is facing positive organizational scholarship?**

The challenge is the interface between the theory and the practice. POS and positive psychology have generated numerous insights that have broad, mass appeal for general audiences. But that mass appeal also brings more questions and higher expectations for us – as scholars – to be able to explain more fully the "why and how" of cultivating thriving in the workplace. On the surface, the ideas and the phrases of POS and positive psychology are appealing. For instance, my work on best self discovery and best self engagement (e.g. are you bringing your best self to work every day?) – resonates with people on multiple levels.

The task for POS is to advance conversations on the basis of evidence-based approaches, especially when the constructs are quickly latched onto and disseminated, or featured very prominently in various media outlets (which, by the way, wasn't the case 20 years ago for psychologists and organizational

scholars). But now there is more room for more voices: readers, consumers, managers, and sometimes researchers are not able to easily discriminate between these evidence-based approaches and some appealing brand campaigns. It is our role as POS scholars and positive psychologists to provide solid theoretical explanations and empirical evidence.

**From a practice perspective, what more can organizations do to incorporate and apply POS research into the workplace?**

I'm really excited about what I've heard lately – especially in the past two to three years – about organizations that are partnering with researchers to systematically test interventions related to positive organizational scholarship and positive psychology. Building upon our work with the reflected best self exercise, groups of researchers have been collaborating with global organizations to systematically test the impact of structured affirmation on outcomes such as turnover and performance, as well as some physical health indicators. So, there are some very interesting researchers who are offering exciting new pieces of evidence for POS. This kind of research would not happen without organizations who are willing to be collaborative learners.

Organizations who seek to incorporate and apply POS research into practice should also be clear that doing so requires a whole-systems approach. An organization that truly wants to gain the benefits of positive organizing will need to sponsor more than an annual keynote or workshop, because POS practices involve changing habits, and changing habits requires reinforcement. A similar shift occurred about 30 years ago when organizations got really excited about some of the performance management systems, like GE's [General Electric] model, that mapped the high potentials versus steady contributors versus those at risk; and Morgan Stanley and other firms' 360-degree feedback assessments. But many organizations adopted these practices on a piecemeal basis and did not change their cultures to align with these new performance management systems – which require a great deal of attention and emphasis on employee strengths and reinforcing development on the part of managers and workers. These same companies found themselves dissatisfied with the returns on their investment. Similarly, I hear from a lot of people who have been exposed to the cutting-edge research and the latest discoveries that come from POS, and they're really excited about the practical implications. They're pumped up. Sometimes they're even touched or moved on a deeper level by what they're hearing and what they're envisioning for their work lives and for the organizations. Then they get back into their

organization, ready to work, but the culture of the organization has not changed in a way that is receptive to facilitating thriving, flourishing, cultivating high-quality connections, pro-social behavior, job crafting, best self-engagement, and so forth.

**You're renowned for your work and expertise in positive identities and relationships. Can you tell our readers a little bit about some of your work, what those areas of research are and how it can be applied?**

I would say that the core features of my work are built on some fundamental assumptions, firstly, that humans desire to cultivate and sustain positive identities, and so we begin with an individual in a shared quest to define him or herself in a way that is positive, valuable and meaningful in some way. Second, positive relationships and positive identities are inextricably linked. In other words, positive identities are essential for cultivating more positive relationships and vice versa because no one exists in isolation and identities are socially constructed. We come to understand who we are through our acts and through our connections and interactions with other people. So, the social world gives us the input that we interpret, or that we make sense of, and then integrate into our own identities or sense of self and vice versa. The ways that we show up in terms of claiming more positive identity features – having a stronger sense of self, so to speak – also make us more attractive to others and more capable of building generative relationships with others. There's a Martin Luther King, Jr. quote that captures this dynamic very well and I use it very often. He said, "In a real sense, all life is inter-related. All [humans] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be..." This is the interrelated structure of reality.

In recent years I have focused on identifying the core features of positive identities in the workplace. Jane Dutton, Jeff Bednar and I have developed a framework to explain four pathways of positive identity construction: the growing self, the integrated self, the virtuous self and the esteemed self. We want to understand how to cultivate various aspects of positive identities and their differential impact on relevant outcomes. For example, the "reflected best self exercise" involves cultivating positive identities through structured affirmation in the form of contribution stories. Receiving contribution

stories from significant others helps to change the way you think about yourself, and, by consequence, changes the choices and decisions that you'll make.

The third underlying assumption of my work reflects one of the least obvious links to POS, yet I find it intriguing and essential: people face significant interpersonal challenges with cultivating more positive identities at work. For example, as I'm writing about how to become more authentic at work, I am also calling out the kinds of cultural practices and ego defensive routines that can stand in the way of cultivating more positive identities at work. I've also written about diverse work contexts and the roles of stereotyping and prototypicality in influencing people's abilities to cultivate more positive identities at work. Through that lens, we can identify agentic and innovative approaches that people at the margins employ to make valuable, innovative and distinctive contributions within their work organizations.

These practices for cultivating positive identities can be applied in the workplace, but they are also very relevant in other organizations in the community. For instance, I'm deeply involved in my religious organization, and the cultivation of positive identities and positive relationships is quite central to the work of our Christian faith community. But I would have to say that I have actually learned the most around positive organizing where the rubber meets the road. And for me, that's when it comes to parenting my seven-year-old daughter and two-year-old son. So, at the risk of triggering some gender-based stereotypes (laughs), various identities do provide new lenses and angles that help us – as mothers and fathers – to be more innovative in our work. I could share endless stories about how my research has made me more mindful of the ways that I encourage my children, the ways that I chastise them, and to be aware of the fact that I hold the responsibility for nurturing their best selves.

Take, for example, my seven-year-old daughter. There are certain activities for which she has a natural inclination; she clearly did not inherit them from me nor from my husband. She came into them all on her own. She just showed up that way. Society teaches us to focus all of our extra resources or attention on the areas in which she has more challenges. Yet, we are working with her on becoming more disciplined in growing in her areas of strength. She's an engaging storyteller; she can easily tell you a captivating story off of the top of her head. But we deliberately structure opportunities and reinforcement to grow in her areas of strength. When she produces a creative work, we'll say, "Okay.

Now, read over it carefully. Is that really what you want to say? Could you develop it further? Do you have more thoughts or ideas?” Even more importantly, when our children succeed, we try to reinforce their internal bases of self-worth, rather than fostering a dependence on external validation in order to develop a more positive identity. We do this because psychology research demonstrates that external validation is a contingency-based form of self-worth, and is therefore more fragile and less sustainable in cultivating more positive identities. So when something goes well, instead of saying to them, “I am so proud of you,” we’ll say, “You should really be proud of yourself. Are you proud of yourself? I really admire and respect how hard you worked on that.”

I use these same techniques as a teacher and a leader because our goal in positive identity construction is to increase intrinsic motivation toward tasks. I actively work against employing a carrot-and-stick approach, which suggests that we should try to engage or activate our best selves at work for the purpose of pleasing our boss, or for the purpose of having greater political influence. Instead, I use POS principles to help inspire growth, development and self-actualization.

### **What sort of tools and strategies from positive psychology or POS do you use to enhance your own wellbeing?**

One POS practice that I use is that of intentional affirmation – using evidence-based feedback to verbalize when I have experienced the benefit of someone else’s contributions. I try to recognize and affirm other people’s unique gifts, especially when they’re distinctive and different from my own. My affirmations are based on the assumption that there’s room enough for everyone to shine, because we all shine uniquely and differently, so that there’s giftedness and generativity in that affirmational space. Affirming others helps to enhance my own wellbeing.

Another key POS practice that enhances my own wellbeing is developing my best self. Personally, I don’t make a single decision, small or large, these days without considering my best self. I’m constantly cycling through a decision-making process that involves considering the questions: “Can I contribute from a position of strength? What compromises will I make in my ability to bring my best self to other endeavors if I pursue this opportunity? What skills do I need to develop so I can grow in my areas of strength to be at my best more often and to make my best self even better?”

**Can I just ask you about your thoughts about people who study positive psychology or POS? Do you think that they are happier or less happy than the general population?**

There are two competing characterisations of the field, and one is that the folks who are doing this work are surprisingly tempered in their emotional expression and enthusiasm. (I'll leave that for others' commentaries.) However, I can attest that the POS gathering at the annual Academy of Management meeting, which has been held for about ten years now, has become notoriously one of the happiest places to be at that conference. The POS gathering takes place at 7:30 on a Sunday morning! (We're not passing out mimosas, though I don't think anybody would protest if we did!) But we typically host 150 to 200 scholars from all over the world, jumping out of bed early, early, early on a Sunday morning to come and connect with other scholars who are using POS approaches in their work. You walk in the room and the attendees are smiling, hugging, connecting, laughing, and then hopefully, you'll participate in an interesting conversation that also leads to creative collaboration.

I would say that as the fields grow in these joint areas of study – positive psychology and POS – the profile is raised. We're now seeing research from these traditions being published in the top journals. And so, there's always the potential that the same competitive spirit that kills the joy in most academic settings, through this never-ending battle for being "the smartest person in the room" could infiltrate the POS and positive psych realm. If this happens, our vibe could become as toxic as anywhere else. We're talking about grant money, we're talking about publicity, and now we're talking about some high-profile speaking and consulting engagements as well. It's just something for us to be mindful and conscious about as a community of scholars who are passionate about virtuous action and positive organizing. How do we continue to maintain the generous and generative culture of the community that we've built, as it continues to become more established and mainstreamed?

**What are your views about the contribution of women in positive organizational scholarship or positive psychology? Is there gender balance across the field?**

Placing your question of gender balance within the context of the broader academy, with the emphasis on the US – that's where I'm based – I would say that women are still highly underrepresented in the most senior positions. But POS and positive psychology have been driven by the work of some amazing women scholars, who have been trailblazers throughout their entire careers and therefore continue to be trailblazers in this field. I feel very fortunate to have been guided by them, some directly, but I would

say all indirectly. It is inspiring and exciting to think about how these dynamic women scholars have been trailblazers in many of the more traditional psychology and organizational conversations, as well as some of the frame-breaking and radical conversations.

I would say, though, in the public space of translating POS into practice, that male psychologists' and organizational scholars' work still gets a bit more airtime. Leadership forums still tend to feature far more men than woman as their top-billing keynote speakers. So, that carries over into the visibility of POS research and researchers. This is even more pronounced when considering the visibility or prominence of scholars of color, especially women of color, who are considerably underrepresented in public leadership conversations. Yet many of these scholars have been leading some of the frame-breaking conversations around strengths-based development from the perspectives of counseling psychology, community organizing, social work, social movements, social change, positive deviance in marginalized communities, and asset-based community development for decades. Certainly my work in cultivating more positive identities, namely, building a positive sense of self in the face of identity threat, has included a diverse range of voices. For the sake of being inclusive from a disciplinary perspective – as well as around gender and race – I still look forward to seeing a greater diffusion of the work and the representatives of that work in the broader forum.

**Where would you like to see POS in the long term, maybe in 15 years, and how will POS and positive psychology contribute to social issues?**

My perspective here is somewhat related to the previous question. I would say that POS is going global, which I think is great. It always has been, but it hasn't been branded as such. I think it's been too easy for global audiences to write it off as an American phenomenon, which is driven by cheap slogans and narcissistic tendencies. Perhaps you've experienced some of this in Australia. I've often heard about cultural resistance against questions that I ask about bringing your best self to work, rooted in a concern that POS conversations will promote narcissism and self-aggrandizement. People feel self-conscious about focusing on their best selves for various reasons, which can easily be tagged as, "Oh. Okay. Here comes the American individualism again". I really see the work and the field and the POS community of scholars moving far beyond that stereotype, and I think that's so important. It's pushing the field for all of us to check our own assumptions about what's possible and about what's generative in different cultural contexts.

I'm also excited because I've seen POS become more infused into the core content of business education and psychology, and, in the long term, I would love to see even more of that. When I was in college, in grad school, and even when I started teaching, it was pretty radical to invite students to spend time focusing on their strengths for the sake of leadership development. But now, whenever I'm teaching a course or giving a workshop or a speech, there are always several people in the room who've already completed strength-based inventories as a part of HR or team building initiatives. We are finding more ways to incorporate the POS insights and paradigms into educational and leadership development experiences, and I would love to see POS and positive psychology become a part of the standard curriculum of courses and programs in 15 years, if not sooner.

**If you could offer a piece of advice for aspiring POS researchers, what would that be?**

I would offer that POS is a perspective. It is one approach. It is one angle that a person can take to understand individuals and their organizational experiences. It's not a discipline in and of itself; it is always taken up in conjunction with a discipline or field of study. As such, I would encourage aspiring POS researchers to know your discipline intimately, know your field of study intimately, so that you can situate your questions in a broader literature and help others to understand the true value of the POS lens. For example, with respect to my interest in cultivating more positive identities, I've spent a fair amount of time trying to understand identity threat, which on the surface does not jump out as a POS question. But when I'm really trying to engage in the interpretation of my findings, trying to understand and appreciate the paradoxes in organizational life, I start to have a richer and deeper understanding of how these positive dynamics can coexist with some of the more typical characterizations of organizational life.

**Is there anything else you would like to comment on that I haven't asked about?**

I'm gratified by the creativity and innovation that is sparked by entering into less-chartered territory, by digging beneath the obvious. Identity threat and conflict are obvious dynamics in organizations. The causes of identity threat and the causes of identity-related conflict have been documented. We need to continue to document those. But I find it really satisfying to be able to uncover new pathways for cultivating more positive identities, and for tapping into underutilized resources in the service of helping to create a more sustainable and generative world, especially for diverse workers. Within that frame, what interests me the most is the centrality of paradox in positive organizing which is – and I mentioned

this earlier, I think – the notion that what seems impossible on the surface is not only possible, but is actually the most generative path. As scientists, we might try to polarize or view the world in terms of dichotomies (for example, which is more valuable – focusing on strengths or focusing on weaknesses?). But outside of our laboratories in the field, we quickly discover that the organizational world is much more complicated, and so the answer is often, “It depends”. Looking at paradox helps us to embrace these polarities and then imagine how they can coexist: not strengths OR weaknesses, but developing strengths and embracing weaknesses; not conformity OR deviance, but conformity and deviance coexisting; inclusion and exclusion coexisting; profit and pro social behaviour coexisting; and in some of my recent work, marginalisation as an asset and as a liability.

My work involves turning some of these core assumptions on their head and moving beyond dichotomies to create a richer dialogue and more robust actions that can strengthen individuals and organizations. A recent learning experience that has made a big difference for me in that vein is the book I just released, co-edited with Lynn Wooten from the University of Michigan, and Martin Davidson, who is at Darden, University of Virginia. The title of our edited book is Positive Organizing in a Global Society, and the subheading is Understanding and Engaging Differences for Capacity Building and Inclusion. We started asking these questions about the intersections of diversity and inclusion scholarship and POS several years ago during round table discussions that were often sparsely populated. Our book brings together over 30 diversity and POS scholars to answer the question, “What emerges from your research when you integrate POS with diversity and inclusion questions?” We found there was overwhelming convergence in what emerged along six themes: multiple identities as resources, authenticity, resilience, building relationships across difference, inclusive systems and practices, and innovation, which span the levels of analysis from individual to relational to organizational. I’m just excited about continuing to explore these questions further, to carry forward this work, and to use it in a way that really helps the field of POS to grow.

## Michelle McQuaid

Michelle McQuaid, MAPP, is a best-selling author, workplace wellbeing teacher, and a playful change activator. With more than a decade of senior leadership experience in large organisations around the world, she's passionate about translating cutting-edge research from positive psychology and neuroscience into practice strategies for health, happiness and business success. Her work has been featured in Forbes, the Harvard Business Review, the Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post and more. She is an honorary fellow at Melbourne University's Centre for Positive Psychology and holds a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently completing her PhD in Appreciative Inquiry under the supervision of David Cooperrider.

### **Can you tell us how you became interested in positive psychology?**

I think like many of us, both my personal and professional paths collided. Professionally, I was working for PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in a global brand role. In the services industry, your people are your brand, so I had become more and more interested in how you bring out the best in your people. How do you get them to live the values of the firm? How do you help them show up in workplaces that are often not great at bringing out the best in us due to complexity, uncertainty and constant change? How do you actually help them flourish and be the people they could be? The traditional change approaches we were using were good at getting compliance, but not commitment to these kinds of changes.

Personally I was at that stage in my career where I had technical mastery when it came to my brand role and it just wasn't providing me with the same kind of challenge or interest that it had in the past. As a result, I really wasn't enjoying my job and I was trying to figure if this was just what happened when we grew up or if there was something I was missing in my life.

Around this time positive psychology started getting a lot of press in America because it had become the most popular course on campus at Harvard, and Tal Ben-Shahar's book *Happier* had just come out. I saw him being interviewed on TV and was intrigued with the idea that there might be a science to human flourishing. Tal's book led to Martin Seligman's work, and suddenly this whole new approach to bringing out the best in myself and others opened up to me.

## **What is it that you do today, with your work?**

These days I teach workplaces – organisations, schools, governments and not-for-profits – how to fuse the latest research in positive psychology and neuroscience together into tested, practical ways that enable their people to consistently flourish. It might be teaching people about their strengths, introducing them to Seligman’s PERMA model of wellbeing, giving them a toolbox of interventions to help them be more positive leaders, or running Appreciative Inquiry workshops or summits to embed these ideas into workplaces. This may involve workshops with large groups, smaller coaching circles or ongoing change management plans.

I coach one-on-one, using an Appreciative Coaching framework that helps people explore the changes they’re seeking based on what’s worked for them in the past, what they are hoping for in the future, the pathways that will move them from where they are to where they want to go, and the small steps they can start taking. I really enjoy this focused approach to coaching and the skills you can help someone build to take forward for other changes they want to make in their lives.

I write books and blog for sites like Huffington Post and Psychology Today. I love collaborating with positive psychology researchers and helping them share how their insights can be applied to a global audience who are seeking these ideas. We’re finding this audience is growing all the time.

Finally, I try to find ways to make positive psychology interventions as affordable and accessible to as many people as possible. Last year I ran the first global Strengths Challenge with the VIA Institute and Live Happy magazine and more than 3,000 people in 65 countries joined us to create a small daily strengths habit and measure what impact it had. This year Dr Peggy Kern and I launched the first free PERMAH Workplace Survey tool where people can measure their wellbeing using the PERMA framework, set small wellbeing goals and access a database of more than 200 positive psychology interventions they can try to help them flourish more at work.

**As a practitioner in the field, can you describe the gap between what you’ve seen in the theory and the literature and what you’ve actually found in practice?**

It varies. Take the field of strengths, for example. While there is a wonderful and growing body of evidence around the impact developing our strengths at work might have for our individual wellbeing and performance, there are still very few documented and tested interventions other than the original Seligman intervention of using your strengths in a new way. We also don't really understand the impact underplaying and overplaying our strengths might have, how strengths can cluster or collide or how to use our strengths well in groups. From the Strengths Challenge we saw that a daily strengths development habit may help, setting a weekly strengths goal may be important, and having regular meaningful conversations about your strengths with your manager may make it easier to do more of what you do best. Strengths, the existing theory and literature, have been so compelling that practice has outrun our ability to keep up. The danger is that strengths risks becoming a fad, because workplaces don't really have solid insights on what it takes to make a strengths approach consistently work.

The reality is, measuring at organisation level on some of these interventions is really hard. It is hard to compare apples with apples, to get a control group, to be able to replicate that in other similar environments, just because teams are often so different in terms of their dynamics and the outcomes they're trying to achieve. In other areas, like positive organisational scholarship where the research has originated in organisations, I think we have more solid findings to draw upon.

I think it's the responsibility of each of us to be transparent about what we do know and what we're still learning, and to help non-academic audiences understand that even the best research is only telling us what works for some of the people, some of the time, that these are not proven solutions or guarantees. Instead, they are insights that can advance our understanding, but need to be explored and tested within the reality of each organisation.

### **What do you see as being the defining features of positive psychology?**

For me, there are two defining features. Firstly, it is the study of human flourishing. I think it's important that the field has evolved beyond simply the study of happiness to the broader focus of wellbeing and how we consistently feel good and function effectively as we navigate the highs and lows we all experience. I came to positive psychology looking for ways to be happier. But after completing the Masters in Applied Positive Psychology, I discovered that I had gotten something far more valuable. It

was the first time in my life I really felt like I had the knowledge, tools and support to truly show up and embrace the raw, messy, magic that is life.

Secondly, it is the aspiration to be as evidence-based as possible. I say “aspiration” because coming from a non-research background, I naively assumed that if there was research that underpinned an idea, then it must be true. Then, as I was taught to pull apart different research approaches and their limitations, it became clear that when you’re studying human behaviour, there are so many variables that might impact our results that there is always more to learn. While I think being evidenced-based is an important aspiration to have, I also think we need to be honest with ourselves and others about the limitations of the evidence we have.

**Given your corporate background, what do you think businesses and business leaders can learn from positive psychology?**

The more I’ve learnt about how our brains and bodies perform at their best, the more I’m amazed how little of this is ever taught to business leaders when their primary goal is to bring out the best in the people they manage. I was taught about communication, negotiation, management, innovation, relationship management and sales, and not one idea was ever shared about how our brains function or the psychology of human behaviour. I think this is slowly starting to change, but given the time and money spent on training leaders and the research we now have available, there is no excuse for leaders to not be given the kind of knowledge and skills that positive psychology now offers workplaces to help their people more consistently flourish and to address the engagement, innovation, collaboration and productivity many organisations face.

**For yourself, personally, who is it that you look up to in the field, and why?**

My personal hero has to be David Cooperrider. David was my capstone supervisor when I did MAPP and is now my PhD supervisor. David changed my world the first day he taught us for positive organisations when he pointed out, “Every action we take is preceded by a question,” and that, “Questions that look for the true, the good and the possible are what enable us to consistently flourish”. I’d been so focused on getting stuff done, I hadn’t even thought about the questions driving my behaviour. When I started digging behind them, so many of my questions were driven by my fears, that

the simple act of starting to focus on what was working and finding ways to build on it was life changing – professionally and personally.

I also love the example David sets of how to create global change in the most humble, collaborative and creative ways. While he values an evidence-based approach, he also understands the importance of real-world practice. His diary is crowded with conversations with world leaders (the Dalai Lama, Bill Clinton, Kofi Anan) and yet he still loves making time for his students. And despite all he's already achieved, he just quietly keeps getting on with finding ways to make the world better.

**You are well regarded for your work in Appreciative Inquiry. Why is it that you're so passionate about Appreciative Inquiry? What is it that draws you to Appreciative Inquiry?**

For me, figuring out how we flourish more consistently as human beings has always been fascinating, but if you can't create lasting change through that knowledge, it's of relatively limited use. So I'm passionate about figuring out how you make change stick for people and systems. I genuinely believe that navigating the environmental, social, geo-political and health challenges we're facing needs as many of us as possible to be consistently flourishing. Appreciative Inquiry is one of the best change frameworks I've found to make this happen.

In and of itself, it's a positive intervention. I love standing in an AI Summit in the first activities and watching a whole room of people that will have started the day in completely different places, suddenly feeling safe, connected and energised to figure things out together. I'm inspired every time when you see people's incredible capacity for creativity when we're given the space to play and what we're able to achieve together when we're supported in the right way. My PhD looks at how AI Summits achieve this result neurologically and psychologically so we can better understand these levers as facilitators and how to draw upon them during and after summit experiences. It gives me hope for the world my children will grow up in.

**What would your key piece of advice be for aspiring positive psychology practitioners, so perhaps those who are going through the MAPP and want to work in the field?**

It would be to play with the research. I think sometimes we come out of these programs and think we should now have it all figured out and be able to seamlessly act upon the knowledge we've gained. Of course, that's completely unrealistic. Surely one of the main takeaways from the field of positive psychology is the need for us to be on an ongoing journey of discovery and growth in order to consistently flourish.

James Pawelski at UPenn used to constantly tell us to "trust the process". At the time it drove us mad because we just wanted all the answers. But I think what he was really saying was: trust yourself to figure it out. You have the knowledge, tools and support you'll need to let this unfold in the only way it can – organically, one step at a time, complete with mistakes and failures, joyful surprises and realised hopes.

I had a coaching session with a recent MAPP graduate the other night who works as a counsellor and she was saying, "The counselling practice I'm at isn't that excited about positive psychology and so I feel like I need a transition plan to get out of there and start my own business so I can do all of this". But by the end of our session we'd realised in her counselling room there was nothing stopping her sharing positive psychology approaches if they would genuinely benefit her clients and that her practice wouldn't object to her doing a free talk once a month after hours on these topics. We don't have to save the world from the moment we graduate, we just have to be willing to share what we've learnt where we can find people who might benefit. It doesn't matter if that's one person or one million. Each person we help is one more person who might gain the knowledge and skills to flourish.

Start where you are. Play with the research and ways to share it and apply it. Don't be too attached to being perfect. Do be attached to having the right intentions. Be transparent about what you do know and what you don't know. Try not to tie your sense of identity to being an expert, instead, be open to not always knowing the answers but always willing to learn and try new approaches. Be authentic.

**Do you think the people who study positive psychology and work in the field are happier or less happy than the general population?**

Oh, great question (laughs). Well, I don't know that it makes a huge difference on happiness one way or the other, and it kind of goes to the comment earlier that what I learned through my MAPP journey was that while I went into it thinking happiness was the goal, I came out the other side of it learning that happiness probably wasn't the point.

I think it's a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you would expect us to be happier because we've got more knowledge and interventions to draw upon, and so we should be happier. On the other hand, I think we come out of it with a heightened sense of awareness of self and the world around us and what happiness is and isn't and the danger of striving for it, so that may make us less happy, but we may have lives that feel more authentic and full of meaning. I think it can go either way, to be perfectly honest.

What I see for people in the field who really walk their talk is their ability to navigate through the lows – sometimes heart-breaking lows – that life can bring and still show up with such authenticity, vulnerability and openness to those lessons that it literally takes my breath away. But I also see them soaring and putting amazing things into the world and having some of the most incredible adventures that I don't see other people around me doing without that kind of background in positive psychology. I also think I see them being more realistic about navigating the humdrum of life in between without going, "Oh my god, there's something wrong with me. Why am I not happy now?" To me this is what flourishing really looks like.

**This particular edition is focussed on exceptional women in the field and you're from a corporate background which I imagine was quite male-dominated. Do you have any thoughts about the gender balance in positive psychology with regard to the contribution of women in advancing the field?**

That's such a great question because, overall in the pos psych classes there are far more women than men, generally. I think in my MAPP class probably two-thirds were women and one-third were guys. So you do see far more women practitioners, but if you look at the research leaders in the field, they are nearly all men. I remember Barbara Fredrickson being given the Chris Peterson Award in 2013 at the World Congress and she was the first woman to be honoured as a leading thinker in the field. So, it's an interesting dichotomy.

Perhaps, like many industries, there are a combination of factors making it difficult for more women to find their way to the top. I know my friends who are navigating their way through tenure in universities often feel the system isn't always set up to make it easy for female researchers to rise to the top. I'm sure, just like many other male-dominated industries, there may be things we do as women – for example, the stories we tell ourselves, the futures we choose to imagine, the challenge of balancing work and home commitments – that make it hard for us to find sustainable paths to the top. One of the fastest-growing areas of my business is teaching positive psychology skills to female leaders to help them create the kind of careers and lives they want, not so they can have it all, but so they can find ways to consistently flourish on their own terms.

I do think as a field we're mindful of the need for more leading female researchers. I know Barb Fredrickson and Jane Dutton, for example, do an incredible job of mentoring and supporting other women. I also think there are some incredible female researchers emerging in the field and that this bodes well for all of us.

**Where would you like to see positive psychology in the long term, maybe in 15 years' time?**

This one might not be a very popular answer. I'd like to see us made redundant (laughs). I grew up riding the internet wave, and in my public relations days, my job was describing to journalists what the World Wide Web was and how anyone would ever make any money off it. Of course, a few years later everything had become e-business and if you didn't have an "e" in front of what you were offering then you were being left behind. But now, if you went to an organisation and said, "I've got a great e-business offering for you," you'd be laughed out of the room because doing business online is just part of doing business. I'd like to see positive psychology ride the same wave.

Over the last decade we've had to do a lot of explaining about what positive psychology is. Now the ideas are becoming more mainstream, I find at most dinner parties someone wants to talk to me about the latest research in human flourishing because it's being used at their workplace or their kids are being taught the ideas at school. I think in the coming years positive psychology will simply become part of the way we think about human development, leadership, performance and psychology in general. It

will become absorbed into the way we work, teach, coach, counsel and parent. The need to distinguish a field of study as “positive psychology” won’t exist anymore.

**Thank you very much for that, Michelle. That was incredibly insightful and thank you for sharing your story as well, which I'm sure the readers will find very inspiring. Do you have any final comments or points that you would like to make?**

I think one thing that I find I get asked quite a bit by people who are just finishing MAPP programs is about, “Oh my god, I’ve got all this knowledge now but I'm so scared about stepping out and using that”. Those questions often arise because there’s an element of underlying fear or a sense of personal vulnerability and worry about what they have to share. Often I find it’s our ego protecting us from things that have always sat there, those stories that we tell ourselves – and I was no different.

The thing that I found made it easier along my journey to show up and share what I've learnt with others, was to just be willing to show up and be of service in the world. When I do that, when I walk into a room to teach and I think good, bad or anything in between, I trust that whatever happens in this room today will be the right thing for me and everybody in it. Then I know that my ego is not driving it, and I’m genuinely trying to show up and offer what I can on that day and trust that that experience would be what we all need.

I think if you're finding, at any point, that you're on that precipice of stepping forward and you hear those kinds of fear-based stories coming through, what’s been really helpful for me is just to learn to ask myself, “How can I be of the most service in this situation?” The moment I think about that, then I find the ego and the fear stuff kind of falls away and I'm able to trust that it will be the right thing for me and for other people. That's made the world of difference about me being able to step out in the world and share what I’ve learned from positive psych in the best ways that I can, rather than being overcome by self-doubt or fear or worry about what other people would say about what I'm doing. For me, this has been a really important personal lesson that's come through this journey. I hope it might help others as well.

## **Felicia Huppert**

Felicia Huppert, professor of psychology, is internationally renowned for her work on the science of wellbeing and the promotion of human flourishing. Her research examines the causes and consequences of wellbeing using data from large population samples, longitudinal studies and intervention programs such as the Mindfulness in Schools Project. Felicia spends part of the year in the UK, where she is Director of the Well-being Institute at the University of Cambridge and Emeritus Professor of Psychology, and part of the year in Australia at the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney. She advises the UK Government and international bodies on the measurement of wellbeing and policies to enhance wellbeing.

**In general terms and from your point of view, what are some of the defining features of positive psychology?**

Without a doubt, it's the recognition that wellbeing, thriving, flourishing – whatever we want to call it – is much more than the absence of ill-being, and that's a lesson that's still being learned. A lot of people still haven't got it in the fields of medicine, clinical psychology and others: the recognition, therefore, that it's important to study flourishing or wellbeing in its own right, so that we understand what are the components and the determinants or the drivers, in order to increase flourishing.

**Can you tell us about some of your work in positive psychology, or some of your current work that is exciting you?**

Where my contribution has been a bit unusual is the many years I have spent working in the field of epidemiology or population science. What we know in that field is that in a population, the prevalence of any common disorder (be it alcohol intake, heart disease, depression or anxiety) is related to the mean of the risk or protective factors in the population itself. We tend to think that when a person has a disorder it is something about them – it's something about their life experience, their genes, their resources or lack of resources, their interpersonal relationships and social context. What we forget is that when people have a common disorder, it isn't just about them; it's also a reflection of the population in which they live. For example, some of the early work done by the brilliant epidemiologist Geoffrey Rose showed that if you take nations and you look at the percentage of people that have a

serious alcohol problem (very stringently defined), what you find is that the percentage with the serious problem is directly related to the average amount of alcohol that people drink in that nation. That's even true if you discount the heavy drinkers and you keep them out of the calculation and just look at how much the low and medium drinkers drink. What you find is that the prevalence of people who have an alcohol problem is still related to the average drinking in the population. So that perspective is a very important one from the point of view of intervention. What it means is that if we just intervene at the level of the individual, if we just help individuals who have an existing problem or common disorder, we will never reduce the prevalence of that disorder. What we need to do is make a shift in the mean of the population. It turns out that a very small shift in the average of the population, for example, a small reduction in average blood pressure in the case of heart disease, a small shift leads to a huge decrease in the problem at the bottom end and a huge increase in doing well / health / wellbeing at the top end. So I think that's been a very important recognition, in that it's not just targeted interventions that are important but universal interventions that can shift the population away from disorder and towards wellbeing or flourishing.

### **So your current work? What's got you really excited?**

There are many wonderful interventions that people have developed over many years to improve wellbeing, for example, resilience training, building on character strengths, expressing gratitude; you name it. What I am most excited about currently is that I have come to recognise that foundational to all such interventions is mindfulness. The reason mindfulness is foundational is because what could be more fundamental than learning the skills of awareness and attention? With greater awareness of what we are experiencing, and knowing how to both sustain attention and broaden it, any interventions including resilience training, character strengths, and so forth, any of these is going to be undertaken more effectively.

A lot of my current research is related to mindfulness training, particularly in schools, and we have done a pilot study and a larger feasibility study of a particular mindfulness curriculum called .b ("dot be") – <http://mindfulnessinschools.org>. Recently a consortium led by Mark Williams from the Oxford Mindfulness Centre has received £6.5 million to do a huge randomised controlled trial to establish the benefits of this mindfulness curriculum in schools across the UK. It's a fantastic acknowledgement of the importance of this approach.

The next phase of my research will be focusing on some specific aspects of teacher training, for example, focusing on teachers who train kids in mindfulness, and exploring the scaffolding and support the teachers receive. Teacher training is profoundly important. There are a lot of programs that teach mindfulness to school pupils, and some of them I gather are very good, but they need proper guidance from trained and experienced teachers who really understand the experiences the kids may be becoming aware of. When mindfulness is taught in schools it's really important to have the teachers well trained, especially because of some of the ethical issues with kids. One of the concerns with mindfulness is that someone coming to mindfulness for the first time may be confronted with the experience of difficult thoughts and emotions, so having teachers who are trained in dealing with such potential difficulties is very important. More than that, I believe that the teachers need to have their own personal mindfulness practice because the theory is one thing, but the experience is another, and it's really essential to have the experience yourself if you are going to teach mindfulness.

**What is one goal of positive psychology that should be pursued better (or is unrealised)?**

One of the areas for development within positive psychology is to move away from the focus on the individual, which has been around since the beginning, and have more focus on the relational, interpersonal, social and cultural perspectives, and to link more with the experts in those fields. For example, there needs to be better integration with disciplines such as social psychology and anthropology rather than continuing to focus on the individual. I think there is great potential for development in this area.

**What's the new hot topic for positive psychology in the coming two years?**

What I see as a general hot topic is the focus on compassion. It's not just about a person being mindful, it's about being compassionate to oneself and towards others. Some of us in our small way want the world to be a better place, and I think the way we are going to achieve that is by encouraging compassion, and a lot of research is beginning to happen in that area and that is the way my research is heading as well.

**What is the biggest mistake the field as a whole has made?**

I suppose there are two really. Firstly, as I said earlier, it's been far too individualistic and orientated towards the individual, but that is now being addressed. Secondly, it is the failure to recognise the other important and beautiful work that was done before 1998, and to celebrate that. For example, Marie Jahoda, how often do we hear about what Marie Jahoda did in the 1950s on positive mental health? Or the work of Alice Isen, whose experimental research in the 1980s led the way in showing the effect of positive emotion on social interaction, thought processes and decision making? Much of the work they have done has not received enough credit, at least, that's how I feel.

### **What are the most valid criticisms of positive psychology?**

There has been, in the past at least, a relentless emphasis on positivity. What was lacking but is now being addressed primarily through the mindfulness research, is the recognition that the negative or painful emotions are really important, and wellbeing requires us to experience them, not to push them away or deny them, but have the skills to manage them effectively.

### **If you were well-resourced and in control of positive psychology as a whole, what would you do?**

Ok, that's a hard one but I would look for opportunities to use the ideas and principles of positive psychology in areas to which it hasn't been applied before, for example, in journalism and the media. People have been saying for years that we need more positivity in the media, but we have not done much about it. So what positive psychology could do is offer wonderful prizes for the best and most inspiring and uplifting journalistic articles. The other important area is working with kids and young children to lay the foundations for attitudes and skills that they will retain for the rest of their lives.

### **Which disciplines do you think positive psychology can learn most from, moving forward?**

That's a good question. We often leap straight into neuroscience, but I actually think neuroscience is learning more from positive psychology than vice versa. One discipline I've become increasingly interested in is ethnography. Ethnographers are trained in detailed observational skills, and notice and accurately interpret what is going on in individuals, interpersonally and in organisations, rather than what we think is going on or what our rather crude surveys tell us is going on. I think we can learn a lot from ethnographers.

**Nice suggestion, I've never thought of that one!**

A lot of organisations work with ethnographers these days, and with anthropologists. I think positive psychology can learn a lot from such interdisciplinary collaboration too.

## Covi Chaves

Covadonga (Covi) Chaves is Research Director of the Happiness Sciences Institute at Tecmilenio University (Mexico). She works in the development and assessment of a whole-institutional approach (48,300 students, 1,500 administrators and 4,500 faculty), which embeds the principles of positive psychology into pedagogy and school culture. She completed a PhD in experimental clinical psychology at Complutense University of Madrid (2014) and holds a master's degree in clinical and health psychology (2009). Her doctoral dissertation on wellbeing in children with a life-threatening illness received the International Positive Psychology Association Dissertation Award in 2015. Her research interests focus on three main areas: (1) positive education and its application in university settings to foster students' wellbeing, (2) positive organizations and how to build a positive work culture at universities, and (3) clinical applications of positive psychology.

**In general terms and in your own view, what would you say are the defining features of positive psychology?**

Okay, so this is a very interesting question. When you invited me to contribute to the book, I was thinking about what the main differences between positive psychology and other areas of psychology are. There are a few that I can think of but one of the first things that comes to mind is the passion and the enthusiasm of the people who are working in this field. Passion and enthusiasm are excellent ways to promote research, practice and new findings. In fact, I think that it is hard to find another area in psychology that has grown so fast in the last 20 years. We are collecting findings every day, every month, so I think that this is one of the first features that I see that is different from other areas in psychology. But we should be cautious. If this real enthusiasm and passion of people is not supported by science or scientific and academic practice, positive psychology might get into some dangerous territory. At the last IPPA conference, I remember Barbara Fredrickson said that knowing a little bit about positive psychology can be a little dangerous because it's easy to oversimplify. And that's why scientific rigor should guide our work.

Another feature of positive psychology is that it provides a structure and identity to people who have had that interest in positive functioning and things that make life worth living. Positive psychology helps

to widen the focus of human functioning to include more positive characteristics and experiences. It's given us different concepts, different models, and so on. So I think this is good because we can feel like we are floating in the same ship, so to speak.

Finally, one of the biggest achievements of positive psychology to date is that it is attracting the interest of people who are *not* psychologists. It's attracting the interest of governments, it's attracting the interest of educators too, so I think positive psychology could be the channel for many professionals and scientists who want to genuinely promote human wellbeing.

**I see, very widely applicable but potentially easily misunderstood, is what I'm hearing. Can you tell me a little bit about how you became interested in the field?**

I just started in positive psychology seven years ago. My education background was clinical, as I was undertaking a Masters in Clinical Psychology. Being a clinical psychologist, my ultimate goal was to help people cope with difficult circumstances, reduce their sorrow, and improve their quality of life. However, I was operating within a disease model and I realized that when I started evaluating the progress of my patients, I didn't have scales or methods to assess their quality of life. And I wanted to make sure that when patients exited treatment, that they could say that they are functioning again positively.

During these years, one of my professors, Carmelo Vazquez, was teaching us about depression, and he started talking about something that fascinated me. He was talking about the main factors that help people recover and to start finding a purpose again in life. This expanded my vision. I didn't know anything about that but wanted to know more. After that, I had the privilege and the opportunity to start working with him on a beautiful project that was with a foundation called Little Wish – very similar to the Make-a-Wish Foundation – which fulfills wishes for children with a life-threatening illness. Within this organization, they had the feeling that when they fulfill a wish to a child, these children and their whole family started coping better with their illness. They wanted to test if this was true and so they asked us to do research on this. So we started interviewing families, including children and their parents. I interviewed 100 families. Children's wishes were as various as the imaginations of them. For instance, some children wanted to meet their favorite soccer player, or they wanted to make a trip to New York

or Paris or Disneyland; those were very popular. The foundation and the parents started creating this experience in secret. And one day the wish came true. So, what we wanted to test was how this experience could create different psychological processes that can help the children to cope better with their disease. What we found was that in comparison to a control group, the children that had this wish experience started experiencing higher levels of positive emotion, life satisfaction and quality of life. These changes were also seen by the parents. We also assessed whether it could have a link with perceived health. What we saw was that fulfilling the wishes helped children to decrease some of the perceived symptoms of their illness. For example, one of the common symptoms was nausea, and what we saw in the analysis was that after their wishes came true, the nausea in these children decreased in comparison to a control group. Of course, we had to be careful in communicating the results because people might think that optimism could be linked with the cure of disease, and we weren't suggesting that. What we were merely wanting to find out about was how emotion was related to perceived health.

We concluded that, as Barbara Fredrickson suggests, although the positive emotions can be considered as transient and ephemeral, they may have an effect on people's subsequent psychological wellbeing. Positive emotions could potentially start building the resources that help these children to cope with their disease. So this was a wonderful experience, to work with these people who are passionate about positive psychology, and this was one of my first contacts with the field.

**What a great project! What about your current research interests and where do you hope to spend your energy over the next five years?**

Now I'm at Tecmilenio University, which, as you know, is in Monterrey [Mexico]. What this university is trying to do is to infuse positive psychology into the whole institution. Tecmilenio is a big university – they have 47,000 students all over Mexico and 29 campuses.

**Twenty nine, wow!**

This is a big challenge for all of us because we have to make the same processes work for 29 campuses. The university defined a multidimensional model to guide the promotion of wellbeing in the entire university. This model of wellbeing includes PERMA components (Positive emotion, Engagement,

Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment), and we also added two dimensions. First is physical wellbeing: we considered that a balance between body and mind is important and we promote some healthy habits with the students. The other component is mindfulness, to be present in the moment, and we teach the students how to regulate their difficult emotions. So these are the other two dimensions that we added, and this model is framed by character strengths.

This model guides our implementation and we also defined five routes to infuse positive psychology into the university. One of the first routes is the academic programs such as the positive psychology program where every student, as part of their professional studies, takes classes to learn some of the skills of wellbeing. The second route is to develop co-curricular activities that help students foster wellbeing not only in the classroom, but outside of it as well. The third route is the mentoring program, where a mentor helps a student to identify their character strengths and set academic and personal goals. The fourth route is enabling teachers to apply positive psychology components at the classroom level. For instance, how do they give feedback to students? We train the teachers in positive psychology techniques to give feedback based on the model of personal strengths. Finally, we are also now training our leaders to use these practices in their teams. This is a multi-level initiative; we have this complex ecosystem and we want all of the students, the staff and the teachers on the same page within the ecosystem. So this is one of my projects now and I think I can be here all of my working life because there is so much more to do!

**Yeah it sounds like there's a career's worth of work just there.**

Yes, exactly!

**It sounds very exciting what you're doing there. So, imagine 30 years or more into the future, when you're nearing retirement or getting close to the end of your career, what would you hope to have achieved by that time, looking back on your life's work?**

Well this is a very difficult question (laughs). I would like to capture the purpose I had when I was young and when I started my career at 18 years old. What helped me to define what I wanted to be in my life was this fascination I have with the human experience. I think positive psychology's contribution is to see a wider spectrum of the human experience. As a result, I feel I now have a deeper understanding

of the functioning of people. So, in my future I would like to feel that I have made some contribution to this knowledge and in creating a more inclusive explanation of human nature, which goes beyond disorders and functioning problems.

I also have this as one of my hopes for positive psychology. I see that a good future for positive psychology would be that we don't need to have a separate area called "positive psychology" because it has become part of a renewed psychology with a more inclusive explanation of human nature.

**So, psychology just naturally includes positive psychology and we don't have to call it "positive psychology" anymore?**

Exactly, yes.

**So I guess that's one of the goals that you have for the field. Is there anything else you would hope the field to have achieved in the next 30 years?**

I think that there are many things to achieve. As we saw in the last IPPA conference, there is now a wave of criticisms of the field. I don't think it's specific to now necessarily; these were around when positive psychology began. That's actually a good thing because criticism must come from both inside and outside positive psychology. It's important that we have this critical mind in what we are doing. There are many open criticisms that need addressing. One is methodological; we need to improve our methods. Sometimes positive psychology has overused scales and questionnaires. There are many ways to measure concepts that would give us different insights. For instance, one alternative measurement is experience sampling. Even though positive psychology arguably uses experience sampling more than other fields in psychology, we have to explore using these methods more often because it's difficult to attain reliable information with just questionnaires. For instance, in the last few years, many rankings about happiness in different countries have appeared. I think we should be cautious when interpreting these results because sometimes they are not considering cultural differences that could explain the data. For instance, Caribbean countries, and also Mexico, are very high in these rankings of wellbeing. However, the reality of those countries makes you think of the validity of these results. So I think we have to go more into the cultural differences trying to explain this phenomenon that is happening. Why do these countries have such high levels of wellbeing? Maybe it's because of the way people answer

the questions? Is it because there is a factor that is actually influencing the wellbeing in these countries? We don't really know; we need to do more research in this area. So, methodological issues are one of the most important challenges that positive psychology is having now.

**So in Mexico, people tend to respond very positively to survey data, and that might be a cultural artefact?**

Exactly, but we don't know yet. I have attended several conferences in Mexico about this. Mexico was one of the first countries to assess their national levels of wellbeing. And systematically their scores on wellbeing are very high. There are many potential explanations of this. One could be there are factors that may be protecting wellbeing in Mexico, or in these countries. For example, family connections are very strong. We know in positive psychology that families and positive relationships are good for wellbeing. Also, another factor could be spirituality. We know that the association between spirituality and wellbeing is positive. But one of the most important questions for me is whether it is something to do with the way people answer the items. For instance, Mexico is a culture where people want to show their positive self to others. I wonder if this could be affecting their responses to the self-report questionnaires. Maybe we shouldn't rely too much on the self-report questionnaires and start using other methods. Now we have methods that go more towards the experience, such as experience sampling. We also have the "day reconstruction method," where people reconstruct the previous day and the emotions they experienced, which is less sensitive to biases. So I think we need to use these methods more.

**Is there someone in the field you look up to, and why?**

Okay well this is again very difficult (laughs). I can't pick just one person; there are many people that have done so much in this field. But if I had to select some of them, I would firstly look close to me. One of the people who was working with me very closely is Gonzalo Hervas; he's a Spanish researcher. He's working very closely with Carmelo Vazquez, and he's contributing fascinating research, especially in the area of emotional regulation. And now he's started some studies about how to promote emotional regulation processes in people with borderline personality disorder. This is one of the contributions that he is making now in Spain. He was one of the supervisors in my dissertation.

Also, while there are people that I admire who are within positive psychology, there are many people who are doing related work and who don't call themselves "positive psychologists" who I also admire. This is the case of my other advisor during my dissertation. I was a visiting student at the University of Connecticut in the United States and one of my advisors was Crystal Park. Crystal Park is doing excellent work in the processes involved in finding meaning after the experience of trauma. She developed a comprehensive model of meaning, and meaning making, and is applying this model to a variety of health-related problems and traumas, especially in the case of chronic illnesses, like cancer or heart disease. Her work is so interesting for me because she explains people's attempts to find meaning in, or to create meaning out of, negative life events. I admire very much her work.

**Who would you say has had the biggest impact on your career so far?**

Again, many people, but if I had to just choose just one, I would choose my advisor Carmelo Vazquez. We share some preferences in research. He always says that he has a double interest: one rooted in clinical psychology and one that tries to be anchored in the study of emotions and positive cognitions. I shared his preferences in these two areas. For me it's important to have them both. As I told you, I am a clinical psychologist, and the study of wellbeing and quality of life complements perfectly my clinical view. I am very much interested in the intersection of both; that's why I admire him so much. He's recognized in my country, Spain, and also around the world. He participates in the European Social Survey, in the evaluation of national levels of wellbeing. And again, this project is part of one of the biggest achievements of positive psychology, as the implications of focusing on the study of what constitutes a good life go beyond the limits of psychology. These measures of wellbeing are starting to affect politics in some European countries. They are starting to integrate wellbeing with public policy in education and health programs. This is the thing that fascinates me about positive psychology because it is not just something about psychology; it's something bigger than us. It's attracting the interest of governments.

**This particular edition of the book is talking about exceptional women in the field. Do you have any thoughts about the contribution of women in advancing positive psychology or thoughts about the gender balance in the field?**

Thanks for including this question in the interview. I think that it's important to recognize the work of many women in positive psychology. There are many women who are strongly contributing to positive

psychology. Sonja Lyubomirsky, Lea Waters in Australia, Barbara Fredrickson and so on. As a woman, I admire them, I admire them very much. Here in Mexico we have Margarita Tarragona, a wonderful woman with important contributions to the clinical field, also Marisa Salanova, in Spain, who is working in the application of positive psychology to organizations.

I think in the different fields of positive psychology: health, education, organizations, we have wonderful women that are working and contributing to these areas. Although there are many women influencing the field, it is important to still work in making women visible in research. I was recently reading something that surprised me. In one study, researchers reviewed articles published in positive psychology and they analyzed the first authors in these publications. They concluded that first authors who are women are underrepresented in comparison to male first authors. The findings also reveal that although women are overrepresented as participants in empirical studies, discussions of issues relevant to women and gender are relatively scarce. Positive psychology research has not sufficiently explored issues faced by underrepresented populations such as women. This is a reflection of one of the main critiques of positive psychology. Positive psychology has been criticized for ignoring issues relevant to culture, gender, ethnicity, etc. So I think we have to make a little more effort with that.

**Do you think people who study positive psychology are more or less happy than the general population?**

(Laughs). I don't know! I think this could be a good research question!

**Yes, it could be!**

I don't know. After all, they are humans too. And things are not black or white. Positive and negative are not mere opposites. They have different features, different causes and different ways to affect our lives. And we can live both at the same time. We can be happy and melancholic at the same time, we can experience growth after an adversity and also feel sadness and loneliness at times. The acceptance of this idea is something that positive psychology has particularly taught me.

**At least in my personal experience, however, sometimes I feel that there's almost an expectation that because you work in the field that you should be happier more often.**

Exactly. People often say to me, "You work in positive psychology; you should be very happy!" (Laughs). They expect you to be happy all of the time. It could have an effect, maybe, but I agree with you. Sometimes people misunderstand positive psychology and it could be very dangerous. Misconceptions about happiness sometimes prevent us from actually being happy. So I think we have a responsibility here; we need to teach people more realistic ways of thinking about the field. I think the good thing about positive psychology is that people are very attracted to it and they are trying to learn more about it, but the important thing is that the experts can communicate realistic expectations about the science.

When I was doing the research with children, I was very careful because, as I told you, the relationships between health and wellbeing are easy to misunderstand. This study attracted the interest of the media. I was very careful in communicating the results because I knew that they were expecting me to say that perhaps positive emotions could cure people of cancer or something like that. So I tried to be especially careful with that. The following day I read the newspaper headline: "Optimism can Cure Children"... I wanted to die at that moment, because this is something that I wanted to be very careful to avoid. Although sometimes it is very difficult to fight that, we have to be very responsible about the accurate communication of the science to people.

**So in those tabloids or attention grabbing headlines, the real science behind positive psychology can be lost.**

Yes, exactly.

**Is there any particular concept or tool from the field that you've found particularly helpful for your own wellbeing?**

In recent months I started reading more about compassion and loving-kindness meditation. Two weeks ago I saw on TV, or I don't know where, this footage of students meditating for love or for peace in the world. All of the schools were just meditating for peace and asking for peace. It is absolutely one of the most beautiful things in the world. They are the future for their countries and they are developing the kindness and compassion for other human beings. I found this to be wonderful. And especially this moment that we're crossing now, I think it is important to explore whether over here in the university

we could integrate these practices into the classroom. Now I am working in education and this is something I would like to achieve in our schools and universities. We have the responsibility that children and students, in addition to achieving professional and academic goals, they have the competencies to be responsible and caring citizens. That would be the best definition of a good school.

**Do you have a favorite positive psychology resource (e.g. TED talk, article, book, etc.)? Is there one that you consistently go to?**

There are so many, which is very good because positive psychology is spreading very fast and now we have so many resources. TED talks are a good way to learn about positive psychology. The range of speakers in positive psychology is wide, so it is a good way to start learning about this world. Sometimes my friends ask me for recommendations.

**Which ones do you recommend?**

Sometimes I recommend some basic videos from Seligman, or I like the one that talks about the relationship between happiness and money.

**Ah yes, that is a great one.**

Yes, this is the “one million dollar” question: is happiness related to money? Sometimes I recommend this one to our students in the positive psychology program when we are in the module called “happiness and money”. What we do is try to analyze the differences between spending money on material things or on experiences, and analyse the different effects on wellbeing.

Also, I don't know if you know this one: Pearltrees. This is very nice website. Pearltrees is a place to organize all your interests. It lets you organize, explore and share everything you like. You can go there and it provides you with a population of different websites on positive psychology. You click one link and it goes to another and you can find many good collections of research, practical tools and readings on positive psychology.

**Is there anything you would like to comment on that I haven't asked today?**

I think we have many things to do in positive psychology, especially with the methods, rigor, cultural differences, etc. I'm expecting that these things will improve in positive psychology in a few years. But I would like to see if we can challenge ourselves and take a bigger step than that. I would like to see positive psychology become a natural part of the whole of psychology, which explores the full spectrum of human experience.

## Jo Mitchell

Jo Mitchell (PhD) is a clinically trained psychologist and works with professionals experiencing mental illness, burnout, or struggling to achieve important life goals, find meaning and live well. Jo has an active interest in wellbeing science – including positive psychology, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and mindfulness – and completed her PhD in this field. She has a passion for remixing ideas and connecting people and projects to create collaborations that make positive change. Jo is co-founder of The Mind Room and Wellbeing Manager for the AFL Players Association in Australia. She is a board member of Action for Happiness Australia and Science Advisor for Band4Hope.

### **In general terms and from your point of view, what are some of the defining features of positive psychology?**

For me the defining feature of positive psychology is that it's a different lens for viewing the world. That lens is the crucial element in that it's getting us to ask questions differently, to look at the world differently, to consider things that we were missing before, and if that's all that it does, then it's amazing.

I had a conversation the other day with one of our major mental health organisations in Australia, and the first thing I checked with them was if they would have a focus on wellbeing as much as mental illness and verbally they assured me "yes". But when I went through all their materials all I could see is this focus on illness and illness prevention. So, yes, while I think we are getting there, I think they get it to some degree, but there was not this flow-on effect to the publications the organisation was producing, so they need that lens. So for me it's the lens that is a key feature.

### **What's one aspiration you have for positive psychology as a whole?**

That it's no longer called "positive psychology," that it's just psychology, that it becomes so integrated and woven into the fabric of how we think and approach health and wellbeing that we don't need to call it "positive psychology" as an entity on its own.

**Who do you look up to in the field?**

Aaron Jarden.

**You can't say me! Who else?**

But it's true.

**If you could invite five positive psychologists to dinner, who would they be?**

Okay, I think I see people working in this space, but who would not necessarily identify themselves as positive psychologists; these are the people I would want to invite, people like Maria Popova from Brain Pickings. I don't think she would identify at all as a positive psychologist, although she does write about positive psychology at times, but the fact that she weaves together arts, culture, psychology, philosophy and so many different fields, and gives that lens of wellness and thriving, so she would be top of my list. From there, perhaps the quiet achievers, people like Jacci Norrish, who are just out there and doing really good work.

**I always like to have dinner with Jacci...**

Yeah, I know, and she is a beautiful person as well, so you get both things in one. She is someone who identifies more in the positive psychology space, obviously, with her book on positive education just out. Who else? Todd Kashdan, as long as he did not cause a fight at the dinner party. Although, mind you, a little bit of argy-bargy makes for a good night sometimes.

**I don't know if it would be a fight, but you would be almost guaranteed an interesting dinner...**

And I would also like Robert Biswas-Diner along as well. So there we go, with you, there are my five.

**Just picking up on your point about Maria not identifying as a positive psychologist, actually many of the people we invited for this book series say, "Well, actually, I don't call myself a positive psychologist, but what I do, I guess, is positive psychology related stuff," or something similar. So I guess I pick up that there is still a lot of resistance to the label.**

Yes, I feel the same way, because I think we have reached the next stage. It's like we needed the label to get people's interest and coordinate efforts, and now I think that it kind of gets in the way more than anything else. So now I prefer to talk about "wellbeing science". I think that people understand, especially at The Mind Room [editor's note: The Mind Room is Jo's business], that life is more than simply surviving, that people are actually concerned about living a really good life, not just symptom reduction or working with illness. I guess for me it fits with that ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) framework. Oh, there is someone else I would have along to dinner; I would have Rachel Collis or Joseph Ciarrochi along for dinner as well.

**You're one of the key people that has been a great success at rolling out the key learning from positive psychology and practice, and developing a really great business in The Mind Room there in Melbourne and so forth. What positive psychological interventions have you found have gone really well?**

The number one thing would be knowing what your values are and making sure that whatever business or organisation you're working with, and the kinds of interventions you set up, align with that. For me, that's things like growth and learning, fun and humour, adventure, integrity. So whenever I'm thinking, well, what are we doing and why are we doing it? It needs to fit with their values, and I think that, in itself, is an excellent positive psychology intervention – knowing and living your values.

**So it's a good framework to peg everything back to.**

Yes, absolutely. The other one is simply looking after people, although you can't really call it a positive psychology intervention. From the research we know that relationships matter, people in our lives matter, it's a predictor of health and longevity, so I think the same thing goes in anything we do. That is, we look at how we connect with people, look after our relationships and create a sense of community. They would be the two main things.

**And the flip side of this: are there any situations or things you need to avoid, things to be very careful of, with interventions?**

Absolutely. This is my big bugbear. I think too much of the time we see people just grabbing tools or over-interpreting one study. One study says that gratitude is good for us, so people grab it and start to

deliver gratitude to everybody without looking at the whole context of what's going on, either for the individual or for groups of people. I think that's a real trap and dangerous for the field, that it's shared with people who then want to ruin it with overstatement or overuse.

**Whereas people like you mentioned before, Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diner, they have been highlighting the contextual sensitivity of these things for years and not really getting much traction. But this whole ideal of intervention fit, I agree is so important, and I hope to see that literature develop well, but that's kind of where we are at present...**

Absolutely, I think we are getting more nuanced with this whole field as well. Before it was, "Well, is there anything to see here?" and, "Yes, there is". Now that there is something to see, how do we actually make it work well for people? I think that tailoring for people and context, whether it's at an individual level, organisation, or a community level, is essential.

**From the research perspective, we are really struggling going from efficacy to effectiveness in figuring out those learnings along the way which aren't well documented. However, it's still exciting times.**

**Anyway, next question. What's the best thing you have personally got out of learning about positive psychology?**

Honestly, it was the values congruence piece. But I also remember doing my strengths profile, and gratitude came up in the top ten, but not right up there, so I remember thinking that I need to intentionally cultivate more gratitude in my life. I think that has personally made a significant difference to me, but I don't just do it as a "three good things" exercise; this is more, "How do I weave this systemically into my life and make it meaningful in my context?" I think that was probably the first thing that sold me in this space and made a difference in terms of my own wellbeing.

**If you could start learning about positive psychology again from the start, what is something you would do differently or something you'd focus a bit more on in particular?**

I feel so fortunate that my entry into positive psychology was doing some general reading around it, and then I had the opportunity to switch my PhD into this field and do a deeper dive, and the best thing that I got to do was travel the world and meet people working in this space. The more I could meet people the better. The thing I would do differently, though, is look outside psychology more. I would

want to broaden where I go and not just speak to psychologists or positive psychologists about this kind of stuff, but speak to people from a whole range of backgrounds and approaches.

### **An interdisciplinary lens?**

Absolutely! I think that that is where the real value is. Because positive psychology has been so popular, lots of different fields have grabbed it. It would be really easy to be defensive and say, “You’re not psychologists,” or “You’re not academics,” or “You’re not really qualified to do this”. But some of the best interventions I’ve seen, like Band4Hope ([www.band4hope.com](http://www.band4hope.com)), people have not come from that background, they have come from, “We want to get out into the world and make a difference and we are going to do that through trade or aid,” and they have explored different ways of doing it with absolutely no background in the wellbeing science or literature. So I think we will miss something if we don’t look and talk more broadly.

**I guess I could say exactly the same with what I’ve learnt through developing the International Journal of Wellbeing, and it being interdisciplinary. I’ve learnt so much about economics and sociology and public policy’s views on wellbeing, all these things. It seems to me a lot of people are doing very similar stuff but with a different language at the moment.**

Absolutely.

**Now I’ve got a great question for you. Imagine you have been given \$100,000 to put towards a positive psychology project – could be anything – what would it be?**

This culture of “busy” – how do we turn that around? We just seem to have such a strong culture of productivity and busyness and we wear it like a badge of honour, and I think there is something about rest and rejuvenation... How do we live consistently well across our lifespan? Maybe this might be to do with my stage of life where I’m over being “busy” and ready for something different. I know you’re researching this at present. The other piece is the values research. I don’t think there is enough quality research in that space, so it would be lovely to invest something in there. The final piece is that I’m interested in the “doing” – the application – so if I had \$100,000, it’s probably going to be an applied piece. Actually, we just got given \$3,000,000 to invest in exactly these things, so I’m already doing what I absolutely love to do.

## **I guess my \$100,000 kind of sounds like chump change then really!**

We have just been really fortunate to get this big grant. It's exciting and challenging to do some good with it.

I was talking to a young female educator whose passion is working with year 9 and 10 students and helping them to learn some of these ideas around wellbeing science. When she was talking to me she was saying she had recently moved to a farming community – her partner is a farmer – and we were talking about the challenges for health and wellbeing in rural communities. She had put up a flyer for a positive psychology workshop in the local town with great trepidation thinking no one would sign up or turn up. However, it sold out in moments, there was such a hunger and desire for it. So then we started talking about other health and wellbeing movements relevant to the rural community – things like Farmstrong in New Zealand, the work that they were doing, but also the “yarn bombing” movement. Yarn bombing is where crochet or knitted yarn is used to cover public objects like poles, trees and fences. It aims to brighten up the public spaces we share.

This conversation sparked an idea that you could go to the local craft or knitting group, or start your own in a rural community, and add in a wellbeing conversation focus. Once you had talked wellbeing and knitted up a storm, you take your good work to a neighbouring community and “yarn bomb” the town square or a central location. So the greater good is that we are going to a community next door, yarn bombing their community, and sparking curiosity and awareness about wellbeing science or positive psychology along the journey. We would create a cycle of “knit, talk, yarn bomb” to connect people and communities and improve health and wellbeing. We wondered if an idea like that could capture the imagination of rural communities.

Now, whether it's yarn bombing with a wellbeing science twist, or different campaigns or interventions, it's how do we take things from, “I'm interested in this for me as an individual,” to, “We as this small collective,” to, “What we can contribute back to the community more broadly?” That's what I would do with my \$100,000. I'd fund creative, committed, switched-on people like this lovely lady living in a farming community to bring an idea like this to life and share the learnings.

**Do you have any thoughts about the gender divide in positive psychology or women in positive psychology generally? Or do you see gender as an issue across the field as a whole?**

Gender is always an issue. Certainly in psychology we have more women than men, but if you look at the positions of leadership and influence, they are predominantly men. In positive psychology the leadership seem to be predominantly men. But I don't feel like I've been held back as a result of gender, personally. I think it's still an issue in our culture and something that needs to be addressed, and there are some people doing some amazing work in that space. One of our current crop of provisional psychologists at The Mind Room – Jess Slonim – is a shining example of a new generation of psychologists wanting to make a difference on this topic.

**Any ideas for how positive psychology could get more representative?**

Talk to women and ask what they think is needed (thanks Aaron for asking). Actively promote more women in leadership and have active role models for the next generation. Have more men leading the commentary, like the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and David Morrison, Australian of the Year. Understand the more subtle barriers to inclusion or equality of opportunity. Finally, I think encourage up-and-coming female psychologists to have a voice and be active in the field.

## **Veronika Huta**

Veronika Huta is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Ottawa, Canada. She has a PhD in clinical psychology from McGill University. She conducts research on eudaimonia, hedonia, elevation and meaning, and works on developing an integrated theoretical model of the eudaimonia-hedonia distinction in the domains of wellbeing orientations, behaviors, experiences and functioning. She teaches courses in advanced statistics and positive psychology, and is one of the top-rated instructors in her faculty. She is a founder of the Canadian Positive Psychology Association, and she co-organised the first cross-disciplinary conference on eudaimonia.

**In general terms and in your view, what would you say are the defining features of positive psychology?**

I really like the field because it broadens the slice of human psychology that gets studied. So, you've got not just mental illness and dysfunction, but flourishing and virtue and peak experiences and positive institutions. You've also got not just everyday concerns but more existential concerns – so it's stretching the comfort zone of the field of psychology, in a healthy way. Also positive psychology is really trying to make inroads towards a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. For example, there's a new issue coming out in the Journal of Positive Psychology that's going to focus entirely on qualitative methods. I really like that because I see human psychology as a very, very broad topic. We are very complex creatures and I like how positive psychology is filling in some of those gaps.

**So I guess the multiple methods used in positive psychology is a strength of the field?**

I think so. I think that positive psychology is very well poised to illustrate for the rest of psychology how valuable these approaches are. They're more exploratory and there's definitely a place for exploratory research, in my opinion. They give richer descriptions; they give a more subjective inside view of various phenomena. So it's a little bit less cut and dry, a little bit more detailed, and I think that it fits very well with the field of positive psychology. It can be a pioneer in this area.

**How was it that you came to be interested in the field?**

It was during graduate school. I was doing my PhD on depression. It's obviously an important topic, but it wasn't my cup of tea. I was looking for something else and I kind of had a feel for who I was and where I wanted to go, but it really didn't crystallize for me until I saw the presidential address that Seligman had given to the APA and it was like... I literally finished reading that and I felt like someone had handed me a mirror and I saw myself for the first time. Well, maybe not for the first time, but it really gelled for me. It was really nice to think that there were other people out there with similar interests to mine and there was this whole movement afoot, and that I could be a part of it.

**It's surprising how many people had very similar experiences to that – initially studying parts of clinical psychology and eventually wanting to learn more about the other side. I think it perhaps shows how timely Seligman's speech was and speaks to how successful the movement has been.**

It was fantastic. It was transformational. And I find that Seligman really has a feel for where this field needs to go next. For example, these days he's really emphasizing the idea of prospection, so the idea that we need to study and support the human capacity not only to be pushed by the past, but also to be pulled by the future – to be drawn by vision and values and so on. So, yes, I just think it's heading in a very good direction.

**What about your current work in positive psychology? Can you tell us a bit about your current work, what your focuses are, or some of the research that's exciting you at the moment?**

Sure. I guess I could start by saying that what I focused on previously was looking at eudaimonia and hedonia, that's really my main area of research, and it continues to be my main area of research, so, looking at eudaimonia and hedonia and how they relate to various wellbeing outcomes. I define "eudaimonia" and "hedonia" as orientations, as ways of living. So, if you define them that way then you can study them as predictors of a variety of outcomes. But what I'm focusing more on lately – and I'm really excited about this research because it's taught me so much more about the eudaimonic / hedonic distinction – is how eudaimonic and hedonic pursuits impact not just the individual but also the people around them. In other words, looking at wellbeing in a broader way, not just personal wellbeing but the wellbeing of the people close to you, the wellbeing of the broader community and also the wellbeing of the environment. So, looking at wellbeing in that broader sense, that's one thing. One of my graduate students is specializing in that.

Another student is working with me to develop a questionnaire on worldviews, to see how they relate to eudaimonic and hedonic orientations. I think that's a fantastic approach because eudaimonia and hedonia really represent two of the main ways in which we approach life, two of the main "things" we are after, so to speak. So it makes a lot of sense when you want to study predictors, to ask, "Okay, if these are the things that people are after in life, how do the rules of the game of life operate in the first place? How is life structured? How does life function?" That's where worldviews come in. So I'm really excited about that.

We're also doing a bunch of other stuff. We're doing research on cognitive functioning – differences in eudaimonic and hedonic mindsets and how they relate to cognitive functioning – things like time perspective, abstract thinking, perspective taking. We're also looking at automatic functioning, so things like skin conductance and heart rate responses.

That's on the empirical end. Then on the theoretical end, what I've been really interested in over the last few years is developing a deeper understanding of the eudaimonic-hedonic distinction, because I really don't think it's just a tradition that's carried over from Ancient Greece. It's a perennial phenomenon in human nature, but I think we need to do a better job of characterizing it. I co-authored a paper with Alan Waterman recently and we looked at all of the different research definitions people are using of "eudaimonia" and "hedonia", and we realized that really there are four rather different ways in which people are conceptualizing these things. One way is as orientations – what you are after in life. Another way is behaviors – what you actually do in life. A third way is experiences – what do you feel? Do you feel pleasure? Do you feel meaning? The fourth way is more of a functioning approach – abilities and achievements that you've acquired after extended periods of time. So, what I've been really focusing on over the last couple of years, both theoretically and empirically, is trying to characterize what eudaimonia and hedonia look like, within each of those four categories. What variables would be subsumed under those umbrellas in each of the categories? One thing that became very clear to me during that process is that the category of hedonic functioning really hadn't been addressed. The category of experience has been addressed in both a eudaimonic and hedonic sense. You've got measures of pleasure; you've got measures of meaning, elevation and self-connectedness. But when it comes to functioning, you've got Carol Ryff's eudaimonic functioning variables – which include autonomy, personal growth and so on – but you don't have much of an understanding of what hedonia would look like as a way of healthy functioning. So I've written a chapter recently where I've

talked about this, where I've proposed a model of healthy hedonic functioning. That would include things like being able to be selfish when it's appropriate, being able to use the sensual part of yourself appropriately, knowing how to savor, knowing how to live in the here and now, being spontaneous, letting go under certain circumstances, and so on. I'm collecting data on that and we'll see how that goes.

**Sounds exciting. Do you think that when we talk about the different types of wellbeing – hedonic wellbeing, eudaimonic wellbeing – within the positive psychology community, do you feel that one type of wellbeing is valued more than the other?**

I will have to answer this question in two different ways. On the one hand, yes, clearly, in practice, hedonic concepts get assessed more often. The question is, why? I actually think it's not necessarily because people disagree with the existence and validity of eudaimonia. I think by and large the wellbeing research community is on board (though there are definitely exceptions, and we can talk about that too). But I think it's more a matter of inertia. So, the dominant conception of wellbeing until very recently – and it remains a dominant conception – is subjective wellbeing. That's more on the hedonic end and includes positive emotions, being low on negative emotions and being high on life satisfaction.

There also seems to be a knee-jerk reaction when people want to assess eudaimonia. A lot of researchers have an inkling that both hedonia and eudaimonia are important and ought to be measured, but then they throw in subjective wellbeing and Carol Ryff's measure of psychological wellbeing. I'd like to contribute to making various fields more aware that you can measure both eudaimonic and hedonic experiences and both eudaimonic and hedonic functioning. In other words, if you're going to measure feelings of positive affect and satisfaction, it's important to also measure feelings like meaning. If you're going to measure Ryff's eudaimonic functioning, you also need to measure hedonic functioning because there are definitely positive things that a hedonic mind set and regular hedonic practice bring into your life. So I think it's really more a matter of time than anything else.

**Going back to your earlier point. There were some articles that came out recently about the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, and that possibly they might not be as separate as previously thought. I just wondered if you had any thoughts about that.**

(Laughs). I'm glad you asked. This is my take on it. I actually agree with the critics to a large degree. I think there's a lot of confusion in the literature and there are major data gaps. When I read these criticisms I find myself nodding my head a lot of the time. What I have trouble with is when I read their conclusions and they try to throw out the baby with the bathwater. When they say, "There's some flaws with the literature, there's some major gaps, so let's get rid of the idea of eudaimonia altogether," when you look at how long this distinction has existed in the philosophical literature and the humanistic literature, and when you look at how compelling the theoretical foundation is, to my mind the most logical approach is to treat it as an empirical question, rather than to dismiss it out of hand. So I've had a lot of the same concerns, but I've tried to address them through an empirical route. One thing that, frankly, hasn't been done, is to differentiate between different types of wellbeing. So let me talk about that a little more because you might feel that that's not true. But let me explain.

Eudaimonia and hedonia are often discussed as wellbeing (as experiences or functioning). I actually disagree with that. I see them as ways of living. But if you do focus on them as wellbeing, then what you need to do is use factor analysis, which is basically a way of summarizing the inter-correlations between different variables, to give you a sense of which feelings or forms of functioning tend to go hand in hand, which variables tend to go hand in hand, and which ones tend not to go hand in hand. What we need is basically a factor analysis of the different experiences that people can have or the functioning people can have. That hasn't been done. What has been done are factor analyses where they used feelings to reflect hedonic concepts, and they used functioning to reflect eudaimonic concepts. They found that the concepts separate into two piles. But the question remains: do those two piles arise because of the difference between eudaimonia and hedonia, or because of the difference between experiences and functioning? So, what I've been doing over the last few years is collecting a huge dataset about experiences. And really, I've included about 30 experiences from the eudaimonic literature and from the hedonic literature, trying to include most of the stuff that's been operationalized to date. I'm also going to collect data on different kinds of functioning.

**When you refer to "experiences," what types of experiences are you referring to here?**

When I talk about “experiences,” what I’m talking about are subjective feelings and cognitive-affective appraisals. On the hedonic end it would include things like: positive emotions, joy, pleasure, comfort, relaxation, carefreeness. On the eudaimonic side, theoretically at least, it would include things like: a sense of meaning, a sense of value, a feeling of purpose, or a feeling of accomplishment. Various feelings of elevation, inspiration, peak experiences and self-connectedness are also concepts that are on the eudaimonic side.

So yes, what really hasn’t been done is to look at whether there are two flavors of wellbeing experience, so to speak – or whether it all just comes out in one big lump. To be honest, I expected it to come out in one big lump, which is why I operationalize eudaimonia and hedonia not as wellbeing *outcomes*, but as *ways* of living. In other words, as the choices that people make. But I was amazed. I’ve done a preliminary analysis of the first 677 participants – I’m not done with data collection – but certainly a large enough sample size to get robust results, and what you get is a clear distinction between these two groups of outcomes, between these two sets of feelings.

**When you look at positive psychology as a whole, what would you say are the most valid criticisms of the field?**

I’ve been reading the earlier editions of this book and I find that I’ll just be repeating a lot of the same comments that have been made on that particular point. But I guess one “beef” I have is that the application sometimes gets ahead of the science. Obviously this isn’t true of all of the practitioners, but there are some practitioners who haven’t taken the time to really learn about the research in a rigorous way, and, most importantly, to develop a feel for the nuances, for how to interpret the findings. So they end up with these very oversimplified statements like, “You’re guaranteed to improve your wellbeing if you just practice optimism on a daily basis”. The research is a lot more nuanced than that. In fact, there’s quite a bit of research coming out now showing that optimism, yes, it is good in the majority of circumstances, but there are situations – especially situations that you can’t control and can’t change – where optimism can actually be detrimental. So that kind of nuanced perspective I think needs to be felt and processed more strongly in the practitioner’s sphere.

Another thing is that I worry that the field is still quite Western-centric. So there’s this real emphasis on positive emotions and even things like accomplishment, and I wonder to what degree that’s cross-

culturally universal as a desired state, as a necessary state for wellbeing. It sounds to me very self-focused, to focus that much on personal pleasure, on personal enjoyment and perhaps even on accomplishment. Lately I've been thinking about trying to formulate it for myself and trying to learn about a broader perspective – and I'm going to need data to really get a handle on it – but I suspect that happiness is a little bit of a different animal in the sense that it's not just this jubilant state, necessarily. It's more of a state that Barbara Fredrickson described, more of a state of access to all of what you are, things flowing well, a sense of integration and harmony. Antonella Delle Fave has done some fantastic research looking at different cultures, and actually she's found that the most common layman's definition of "wellbeing" is one of harmony and integration. I think there is something very wise there. I would describe it as the right kind of freedom, so to speak. It's a state of psychological freedom but not necessarily of overly positive exuberance.

**So, the next step for positive psychology is to potentially extend beyond the West and to go more into Eastern and other cultures?**

Absolutely. I think we all feel that way and there's been a large push in that direction. You look at Positive Psychology 2.0, as Paul Wong has called it, and that's one of the major mandates of what he hopes is going to be the next wave of positive psychology: a much more integrated and much more cross-cultural understanding.

**If you could rewind the clock and start learning about positive psychology from the very beginning again, would you do anything differently?**

(Laughs). Not much! I tend to follow my gut. I tend to trust my instincts, and I think it might have been a bit of a crooked path, but I trust that path. Perhaps one thing I might do differently now, and certainly it's easier to do it now, is to take a course on the topic, to get more of a broad base. I didn't really get a broader perspective on the field until I had to teach a course on it. Teaching a course is the best way to learn about anything, and that's when I really took the time to develop a good reading list and to read up on different areas.

**Do you think people who study positive psychology, or those who work in the field, are more or less happy than the general population?**

I don't know if anybody's done the research to answer that question, but I'd be surprised if it wasn't true. How could somebody not benefit from learning about this material day in and day out? Not just learning about it from the data but having to process it, having to think about it on a conceptual level. I know generally speaking people who work in the field of psychology find that they benefit because you've got all of these pointers that come your way – through your own research, through attending other people's talks, through reading publications. All of these things help with the challenges and the experiences that we all have. So, yes, I would say that I would be surprised if it wasn't true. I'd have to say that I've noticed that the community of positive psychologists is wonderful. I attended the second positive psychology conference, and I've attended every one since. I remember thinking right from the start: this is my community, these are the people I want to spend time with. It was like an electric environment; it was very stimulating. So, definitely a happy field to be a part of.

**In your own wellbeing, has there been any concept or intervention that's been particularly helpful for you over your journey?**

Hedonism, I'd have to say. I know that sounds strange. Perhaps I should use the word "hedonia" rather than "hedonism" because "hedonism" comes with so much negative baggage and negative connotations. I was a pretty hard core eudaimonist before I went into this research area. It was all about investing and working hard, and not having any fun. By working with this data and having to think about it, having to really internalize it, I've learned much more about the value of balancing both. I would also say that I've learned about what it means to have healthy hedonism, because there are different types of hedonism. I would say tentatively – I haven't worked this out fully in detail – that hedonia is healthy when eudaimonia plays a little bit of a supporting role in the background, when it kind of "reins it in". In other words, when you put in the effort to make the healthier choices, like not watching a movie tonight, but, rather, spending some time with your family, and pay attention to the things that actually enrich your life, so having a little bit of self-regulation to make the healthier choices, the ones that do make you happier. Healthy hedonia is also about not going to excess – so again there's that role of eudaimonia reining you in. Even the effort of really being present and really trying to savor a hedonic experience while it's happening has a little bit of that supporting role.

I think it's an interplay between the two and actually I think the interplay goes the other way as well. I think if you are just a pure eudaimonist (and I know this from first-hand experience) and you don't have

hedonic awareness to rein you in and keep you from exhausting yourself, you can really go and tire yourself out.

**Do you think that would characterize a lot of other people in academia?**

Yes, I do. We could all use a bit of healthy hedonism every once in a while. I don't think you need it to be 50/50. I love working hard; my colleagues love working hard. This is what I chose to do. And I'm happy as a clam. But you do need a certain amount of hedonic activity. I imagine the amount that you need varies from person to person, but I do think that you need at least that 5-10% to function well.

**This edition of the book is about recognising exceptional women in the field. Do you have any thoughts about the contribution that women have had in advancing the field? Or do you see gender balance as an issue in positive psychology as a whole?**

I don't think that gender really is a problem in the field. I really haven't seen any obstacles; I haven't run into obstacles; I don't have any female friends in the field who have run into major obstacles. I don't think it's like some fields where you know you're not even part of the conversation if you're female, or where you get a kind of patronizing pat on the back if you're female but also managed to have a good mind. From what I've seen in the field of positive psychology, what makes you respected is simply your work. The quality of your ideas and the rigor of your work and that's it.

**Would you like to make a comment about anything that I haven't asked about today?**

I'm good! I'd just like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me.

## Emily Heaphy

Emily D. Heaphy is an assistant professor of organizational behavior at Boston University's School of Management. Emily conducts research in two areas. Her research on high-quality connections articulates what positive work relationships are and how they make a difference at work. In a second area, Emily uses ethnographic methods – interviewing and observing people as they go about their work – to understand situations in which people need bureaucratic organizations to respond flexibly, such as when people encounter problems when receiving healthcare, or need to negotiate for time off from work in time-hungry occupations. Emily received her PhD in management and organizations from the University of Michigan and a BA in women's studies from Wellesley College.

**Could you just tell us a bit about what prompted you to get interested in positive organizational scholarship?**

Sure. So, I started graduate school at the University of Michigan in 2001 and I feel like I was academically born into positive organizational scholarship because I arrived and September 11<sup>th</sup> happened during my second week of classes. In response, the faculty in my department organized a website that was trying to figure out what their scholarship could say to various people affected by September 11<sup>th</sup>. I'm sure that the real origins of the movement are years before that, but I really see that as sort of like a birthing point for the movement. The very first publication I worked on is a 2003 chapter that Jane Dutton and I wrote about high-quality connections [Dutton & Heaphy, 2003]. So, my research really started from there. It wasn't exactly that I made a choice towards POS, rather it's where I started from.

**Can you tell us a bit about what sort of work you've been doing more recently?**

I really built my work around those initial interests in high-quality connections. I've continued to do work on high-quality connections and I've branched out to think more about the positive work relationships that are meaningful for people today at work. I'm also really interested in forms of relational work. I found myself really interested in situations in which people who don't necessarily have a lot of formal power are trying to get something from the organization that they really need. So I've studied patient advocates in hospitals who help patients and family members with very unusual problems they are experiencing while in the hospital. I've studied how consultants in really time-hungry

organizations try to get time off for themselves in a situation where work-life balance is not really valued.

**Can you tell us a bit about what “high-quality connections” is, and where and how can it be applied?**

We developed the term to try to provide some greater specificity and to bring a different kind of focus to what it means to be in a positive work relationship. We proposed three subjective experiences of what it feels like to be in a high-quality connection and then we specified three different characteristics of the tie. We talked about the physiological correlates and how some of those physiological correlates should be able to build health. The basic idea of a connection is that even in momentary interactions, people can have those positive interactions and they can be really powerful and impactful moments. In terms of the subjective experience, we proposed the subjective experience would be a feeling of vitality, a feeling of positive regard, and that feeling of mutuality. In terms of the features of the tie, the one that has turned out to be the most powerful empirically is something we called “higher emotional pairing capacity,” which means that in high-quality connections you can actually feel and express more and a greater variety of emotions while you’re in the tie. Instead of feeling fearful about expressing joy or anger, you feel comfortable expressing both. Then the physiological correlates, we wrote about them and developed it into a larger paper [Heaphy & Dutton, 2008].

**What would you describe as being your proudest moment in the field so far?**

Oh. That’s a good question. Out of this work on high-quality connections and positive work relationships, a micro-community has developed, called the Positive Relationships at Work micro-community. I’m one of the four original people on the steering committee and it has been really fantastic to see this community grow. Every other year we’ve had a research conference and it is so exciting to see so many people really excited about studying positive relationships at work. It’s exciting that there has been a lot of genuine excitement and momentum around high-quality connections and understanding positive relationships at work in general.

**Is there anyone in the field or any people in the field that you look up to, or have been a formative part of where you are today?**

Jane Dutton – she was my adviser and I worked really closely with her and she’s a fantastic adviser. Other people who have been very helpful include Gretchen Spreitzer, who I’ve worked with at the University of Michigan – she is a great researcher. One of the things that I particularly admire about her is that she is unflappably positive in a genuine way (laughs), and that is really amazingly helpful in real life in getting through the day-to-day stuff. I find myself really admiring that about her. Another person I also admire, and I’ve had some connection with her personally but I’ve also just come to admire her work a lot, is Jody Hoffer Gittel. She’s someone who studies relational coordination and she’s really interesting. She had been at Harvard Business School as a faculty member and then moved to Brandeis. To my mind, she is just on fire. She has started a research centre and involved practitioners, and is so alive in the work that she’s doing. She is a person that I really admire. I am not sure what my path will look like in ten years or 15 years, but I certainly admire the vitality that all three of those women embody.

**From your point of view, what are some of the defining features of positive organizational scholarship?**

I would say that the defining features, in some way or another, involve conducting research that has a beneficial impact in the world, so research that will help people in the real world, help their lives be better, make genuine improvements, and not just for people at the top, but people throughout organizations. I think an authentic interest in doing that is one of the things that makes POS distinct.

One of the things I feel like I’ve learned partly from Jane Dutton is that if you’re doing POS-related work it means that you’re in touch with people who might be experiencing or thinking about these positive phenomena. I think from the perspective of what it feels like to do research related to POS – it’s pretty enlightening because it means that I’m getting to talk to people about what their positive relationships are at work, and oftentimes those are the most meaningful moments, most meaningful parts of their work lives. I think that’s a feature of it that has to do with the practice of the work.

**What do you foresee as being one of the challenges that positive organizational scholarship faces in the future?**

I think there's an ongoing process of defining the field for people who are not in it, like: what does "positive organizational scholarship" mean? If you study positive organizational scholarship, can you ever look at negative things or are you ignoring negative things? I think there are lots of people who have provided good answers to that, but I think those kinds of conversations about how positive organizational scholarship is defined will be an ongoing issue. I think another thing is that there is an enormous amount of momentum behind positive organizational scholarship, but so much of it has been centered at Michigan, and with a few particular faculty members, some of who are approaching retirement. I think it'll be interesting to see how the movement continues and how it's passed on to the next generation, especially as people increasingly aren't all co-located at the same institution.

I was at the positive organizational scholarship conference this last summer [2015] and there might have been 100 or 125 people there, and over half of them had never been to a POS conference before. So I really do feel like POS has spread, but how it gets led over time will be a challenge. I think too, as it has become more institutionalized and accepted, there's a certain extent to which POS topics are moving towards being normal (laughs). They're not necessarily positive or positively deviant. They're sort of normal. If that continues, then what will that mean for the movement? I think those are good questions for people to be asking themselves.

### **What more can organizations do to incorporate and apply POS research into practice?**

That's a good question. And honestly, I don't know. I think there's a lot of information out there for people who are interested in understanding POS research. But I think sometimes in practice, even people who have the best intentions don't necessarily have a great sense of how their systems might be having problematic effects or have an ability to effect change.

I'm trying to say this in a diplomatic way. An example, and to be more concrete, I was talking with a co-author and a friend of mine yesterday and she told me a story about how a high-ranking executive visited in her class and she had just been teaching a class about compassion and the students loved it. And this executive thought, "Yes, this is absolutely, incredibly important". But then he struggled to implement compassion in his own organization and he is a leader of it! There's this employee of his who is dying, and the employee would like to take care of all of his benefits to make sure that they will

go to his young daughter when he dies. But there was something about the processes and the people in charge of those different processes that was causing real resistance to responding compassionately to this man who was dying because it involved breaking some organizational rules. Even when people have really good intentions, systems can be hard to change. So, I think it takes a lot of work and I think it takes some communities of support to make that kind of thing happen.

**What advice would you give to aspiring POS researchers?**

Oh. One? (Laughs).

**Or two...**

I think the first would be to get involved in the community. I intend to be, and I think everybody in POS certainly intends to be pretty open and welcoming and encouraging of new people expressing their interest and doing POS work, and the community can be a fantastic resource. There are, in fact, lots of different communities within the POS community, and so I think reaching out and asking about who might be doing work in a particular area and trying to set up a time to talk, and just getting connected. Collaborations really do happen in the POS field. I have collaborations – several collaborations now – that have developed that way with the people who've reached out to me in one way or the other. So that would be one thing. This community is vital and vibrant, and so, reach out.

The other piece of advice is to be brave and courageous in honoring the POS questions you have or phenomena you notice, because one of the things that this movement has done is birthed a lot of new constructs and ways of thinking. But that often can be a long hard process, but it's possible. It's a good community in which to really honour and nurture what can start as a fuzzy intuition or ephemeral sense that there's something worth understanding that might fall under a POS domain.

**In the context of people at work, if people are seeking to find more satisfaction at work or to be happier at work, what's a piece of advice you could offer them as a best bet?**

I am such a believer in job crafting and that whole line of work by Amy Wrzesniewski, Jane Dutton, Justin Berg and lots of other people. So what does that mean? That means figuring out what parts of your work you like the most and trying to grow those, and if there's a part of your work that you really dislike, is there a way that you can get rid of that or rethink it so that it's more enjoyable? So I would point people towards the job crafting approach of making little changes to your tasks, to your relationships, or to the way you think about your work. It can make a huge difference.

**Do you think that people who study positive psychology or POS are happier or less happy than the general population?**

(Laughs). Honestly, no, I don't. I can say that sometimes I feel that one of the things that POS researchers have the potential for is, if you allow yourselves and if you are able to continue feeling really passionate about your work, being able to pursue it can be such a pleasure and such a source of happiness. Studying POS topics can also focus and amplify positive experiences. I remember this one friend in graduate school in a different program who studied headaches. She was just thinking about headaches all the time, and then experiencing headaches. In contrast, I got to think about high-quality connections and so I got to sort of embody that. I guess in that sense that might make POS scholars a little bit happier. But every once in a while, I think, "Gosh! I know so much about POS-related topics and yet I am so unhappy!" So I've certainly had my moments where I think, "Gosh! I know better than this". And so, it prompts a little bit of a change.

**Related to what you just talked about, what tools or strategies from positive psychology or POS do you use to enhance your own wellbeing or engagement?**

I definitely use job crafting. I definitely attempt to pay attention to the people with whom I feel high-quality connections and I try to do what I can to nourish those. I have been involved over the years with reflected best self scholarship and I did the reflective best self exercise myself some years ago now, and that has continued to be a really important anchor and beacon for my own development. It was like an intervention for myself in terms of helping me to see my strengths in a different way, and it's helped me make choices that play to those strengths. So I use those three all the time.

**What are your views about the contribution of women in POS or positive psychology?**

I feel like I can speak a little bit more to POS than to positive psychology because I know comparatively less about positive psychology. In a lot of ways, I don't think about it, but I think what that means is that there are lots of strong women in POS who are really powerful figures within the community. So that allows me not to have to think about it much. Compared to other subfields or micro-communities, there are probably a lot more women in POS, and a lot more women who are tenured full professors. I'm sure that that makes a difference.

I also think about race and international make-up of the community. I do feel like from the beginning, the POS leaders – almost all of who I think are white and with probably half who are men – have made an effort to ensure that there are people of color involved, that it be an inclusive community. In terms of international-ness, based on my experience at the POS conference this summer, the movement was really international and that was very exciting.

So, those are three different dimensions of difference, and, as I said earlier, I think those are important questions and issues to keep in mind, especially as some of the people who've been the leaders of the field get closer to retirement and the leadership gets passed on in one way or the other, because that kind of thing can change a lot in the passing of the baton from generation to generation. It's important to maintain or improve upon the diversity of the community.

**Finally, where would you like to see POS in the long term?**

I think it would be nice if it became institutionalized throughout the world of business schools. So many people use the reflected best self and use job crafting exercises, or some version of them, high-quality connections, too. I think it would be nice if different aspects of it were even further institutionalized in the field, in terms of classes that people take and in terms of what we could offer practitioners. I also am excited about seeing what kind of research collaborations can be developed with practitioners and organizations who are so excited about this work. We may be able to work together to further test and develop POS theory and ideas.

## Shelly Gable

Shelly Gable received a BA in psychology from Muhlenberg College and a master's in psychology from the College of William and Mary. She earned her PhD in social psychology at the University of Rochester in 2000. She began her career in 2000 as an assistant professor at UCLA where she earned tenure and co-founded the Interdisciplinary Relationship Science Program before joining the faculty at UCSB in January 2007. Dr Gable's research focuses on motivation, close relationships, and positive emotions. Her work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Positive Psychology Network. She serves on the editorial board of several journals and received a distinguished teaching award from the Psychology Department at UCLA. In 2005 she received the Early Career Award from the Close Relationships Group of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology; and in 2006 she received the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers [PECASE] from President George W. Bush.

**In general terms and in your view, what would you say are the defining features of positive psychology?**

The best work in the field focuses on understanding the processes that contribute to flourishing and wellbeing, but also it should be expanded to not only look at people as individuals, but to include groups and institutions as well. So I think that the best work focuses on both the outcomes and also the processes that underlie the flourishing of people and institutions.

**Okay, so it involves multiple levels of focus.**

Right, I also think the best work is empirical, it's theory based and it's data heavy. I think that that's really a theme that I try to focus on both when I consume research from positive psychology, do my own research, and also when I teach it to my undergraduate students. Those are the kind of emphases that I make on this: theory-based and data-heavy approach to understanding these big questions about flourishing and wellbeing.

**Can you tell me a little bit about how you became interested in the field?**

Many years ago when I first started graduate school in psychology I was interested in two things. I was interested in close relationships, like friendships and romantic relationships and even parent-child dyads. I was also interested in emotion regulation, in terms of how people respond emotionally to everyday events. When I was in graduate school, those were the two things that I really wanted to look at, and as I started to get involved in the literature and to understand the literature, I realized that in the case of close relationships, almost the entire emphasis in the field was on topics like conflict management and jealousy. There was a lot of work on rejection, or how people deal with rejection. I thought, this didn't fit with my understanding of why people are in relationships to begin with, and what their experience is when they're in those relationships, whether they are friendships or romantic relationships. Many parent-child relationships aren't like that either, and if you asked people why they were in those relationships, or how to characterize those relationships, the first response wouldn't be, "My friend fights nicely and doesn't reject me". It just didn't seem like they fit and there was so much less research on what I thought were the everyday meat and bones of relationships, things like companionship, or people doing fun things together, or intimacy being shared. They were out there, in little bits and pieces, but they weren't a big focus of the research.

So I turned to my other big topic, which was trying to understand how people respond emotionally to everyday events. I was really interested in just day-to-day emotions, not coping with trauma or anything along those lines, but just day-to-day emotions. Again I found that it was coping with stressors that was a big topic. Emotion regulation of negative emotion, so how people manage stress, anxiety, anger, those types of emotions were really big. But there was nothing on what people do when good things happen. I found this even odder because by that time I had started doing my own research. I was doing a lot of daily experience research, which meant I was collecting data from people on a daily basis and I was asking about all the events they were experiencing during the day – and I found that by far, there are more neutral and positive events outnumbering negative events during the day. This suggested to me that our emotion regulation system cannot solely be focused on managing negative emotions, as it wouldn't be a very functional system in that regard.

Both of those topics, unfortunately, didn't have a whole lot of places for me to get a foothold in the field in terms of the topics I wanted to research. Around that time, positive psychology became a "thing," and so that was kind of an automatic fit that drew me into the field because that's what I was interested in and now it had a name.

**So these were interests that you had going into graduate school or that you developed in graduate school?**

I think I developed them early on in graduate school. I came from a background where I wasn't sure whether I wanted to do clinical work or research. I wasn't sure. So I spent some time before graduate school working in clinical settings. I worked with depressed patients, with schizophrenic patients; I worked in a hospital setting. I very much early on ruled that out as a career for me! (laughs). I didn't have the disposition for it. I guess maybe I didn't explicitly articulate it, but in that early stage I thought I really couldn't understand this aspect of the human experience. I really didn't have a lot of insight into pathology. So I thought I should really focus on when things are going well or, at least – I don't want to use the word "normal" – but when things are *not* dysfunctional. I thought, let me try to understand the underlying process when things are actually going in the right direction, and that, maybe, can be my contribution to the field, because really I was not very helpful to anyone who was suffering.

**What would you say are some valid criticisms of positive psychology as a field?**

That's a good question. I think that there are a couple of valid criticisms. I think that, first of all, just like any area of inquiry, there's good science and there's bad science, or good science and not-so-good science. When the work is rigorous, when it's theory-based, when it's even-handed, when it's focused on process as well as outcome, that's when it's good science. I think that's very different from the work that's out there which is not theory-based, that's less rigorous, often agenda driven, and oftentimes focused on surface outcomes without understanding the process. For example, there is a lot of work that maybe looks at interventions and outcomes but doesn't try to understand the process that's leading to those changes or outcomes that are being observed. I think a valid criticism of the field as a whole is that we haven't really done a good job of separating out those two different types of studies – those rigorous, empirical, theory driven studies – and kind of holding them on a higher pedestal than some of the work that's maybe not so rigorous and reliable. I think that's a valid criticism. I think we need to be much more critical in our citing of the research, the way we talk about it, the way we present it to our students and to the public and whoever else we're presenting it to.

I also think that we as a field need to recognize where these processes and outcomes that we're studying – like happiness, flourishing, or creativity – fit within larger human experience and acknowledge that there are ups and downs of everything; that there's a balance in life, and we need to

put these positive characteristics into the larger picture of human experience, alongside characteristics such as suffering. We also need to recognize that there are perhaps negative aspects of even the most positive things that we study, or that even in the most healthy things that we study there are sometimes negative aspects to it. I think having that balanced approach and being realistic about what we're looking at is important, and I don't think we do that enough either.

Finally – I don't think this is a criticism so much of our field as it is the interpretation of our field – but just the equating of happiness with positive psychology. Those two, in my mind, are not the same thing and they shouldn't be treated as the same thing. Happiness is important but it's not all of positive psychology.

**Imagine 15 years into the future. What do you think is in store for the future of positive psychology as a field? And is that future different to where you would hope it to be in 15 years?**

Honestly, I hope that in 15 years there is no such thing as positive psychology, to be honest with you. But that was my hope 15 years ago, so I don't know what to say about the timeline. Jon Haidt and I wrote a paper quite some time ago, at least ten years.

**Yes, 2005 I believe, we use it for one of our courses.**

Right, so I think that we hoped that by now there wouldn't be a field of positive psychology. What I mean by that is, I think that these topics and processes that are of interest to positive psychology should be taught alongside the other topics in non-positive psychology courses, and focused on by people who don't call themselves positive psychologists. Positive emotions should be taught in an emotions course, and topics like love and companionship and positive experiences should be studied by all close relationship researchers, whether or not they're also interested in conflict management and other types of processes. So I really would hope that in 15 years these topics are so well integrated into the larger field of psychology that they're no longer separate. I think the reason that they're separate now is because they were ignored for so long, or at least neglected – “ignored” is too strong a word – but they were neglected areas of study. I think that as our empirical knowledge base catches up with the rest of psychology, they can easily be integrated into the larger field. That's my hope, but it's been my hope before! (Laughs).

**Do you expect us to get there in 15 years?**

Again, time is not my strong suit here but I think it's possible. There's been some great strides empirically and I think if we stay the course in terms of rigorous science, that'll keep us on a trajectory that will get us there in 15 years.

**I do agree with you that too often positive psychology is tucked away into its own little domain and could be better integrated into more mainstream psychology.**

Right, exactly.

**Who was your biggest inspiration in the field?**

I don't know if there's a "who". But I think it's my students. So it's not just one person but it's really all of my students in that sense, especially my undergraduate students. When I talk about these topics and I present this research to them, and we talk about positive psychology, these are theories of life and the human experience. They're so interested in them and they want to learn all they can about them, and they see the applicability immediately and they can relate to them. Positive psychology has become a vehicle to teach them the scientific method and how you can apply the scientific method to study these complex and abstract processes, and how you can make judgments about whether or not something is empirically supported, or take stock in something based on how well it has been researched. It's become this gateway drug, so to speak, for getting my undergraduates to see the value of looking at something scientifically.

**Do you think they embrace the scientific method?**

I hope that they do. Yes, I force them to in some ways in my class because we won't talk about anything unless it's got an empirical basis to it. Starting a sentence with, "My friend did this," or "My friend said this," is not something we include in our discussions. So, instead, "The research says this," or, "The research says that," is the way we start sentences in my class. But I also think the students understand what it means to have good evidence for something like an intervention on happiness vs. not-so-good evidence, and how they'd judge which of two example interventions to try for themselves. So I think that in that way, as I said, it's a nice vehicle to get them to think scientifically.

**What's one learning experience that's made a big difference for you, would you say?**

I think one of the things I've learned over the years is that the simple story, or the easy story, is usually not the correct story. An understanding of what happens is often not sufficient; we also need to understand why it happens and what the moderators are. That's really an important contribution and it's not enough to put something out there without, to the best of your ability, tackling all of the processes that go into it.

A good example is when we first did the capitalization research. The effect sizes are pretty large in the sense that when people are active-constructive it has very positive outcomes for them. When they receive active-constructive responding, it has very positive outcomes for themselves and their relationships, and those effect sizes are pretty broad. But there are a lot of moderators of that, there's a lot of context that's important. Understanding why it is that those responses have such an impact was really important to telling the full story. Then again, going back to fitting it into the larger picture of the human experience, trying to work out how something like capitalization fits in with something like social support, for example, or stress management, and how does that all fit in together. We're still tackling those questions but I think that getting to the heart and really understanding a process from the beginning to the end in all of its ugliness and nuance is extremely important. Only half the story is not good. So the lesson learned is that half the story is no better than none of the story, in some regards.

**Some of the topics you mentioned there: capitalization and active-constructive responding and so on, you're quite well known for those areas and your research on those areas. Where would you say that your work has had its greatest impact?**

Actually, I hope it's had its greatest impact in the field of close relationships. What I mean by that is, I think it was one of the very few earlier examples of topics that were looking at what were perhaps considered mundane or not particularly risky behaviors. These were areas of relationships that were almost completely ignored and weren't something that people thought contributed to overall relationship health. I think that just having capitalization as a counter example to that has had an impact on my field in that regard. So, other research, even if it's completely on a different topic, or at least looking at something that's not about managing negative aspects of relationships like conflict or adultery or anything along those lines, I hope my work helped open some doors to areas of research

that haven't been looked at. I hope it's helped people to recognize that these positive processes really contribute to relationship health and wellbeing across the board.

**It also seems like your work has a very significant application and use in couples therapy, relationship counseling, and that sort of thing. Have you heard about any success in that area?**

There have been attempts in the clinical world to incorporate this into couples counseling, and so there's been some research on this. The results of those studies are just starting to come out now. Another area we're starting to see this applied is within high-stress populations. For example, there've been some recent studies looking at capitalization processes in couples where one partner is facing a health crisis, such as a cancer diagnosis. I think that the more data we have from those larger studies will help us to increase the impact of this more positive approach or perspective in that domain, and it's not just about managing potential negatives in relationships. It's really about making the most of the good things and making those grow. It's about recognizing that it may be just as bad to ignore your spouse and not put in positive effort – to not compliment them, to not be attentive, and those types of things – than it is to have poor conflict management. The absence of those positive processes might be just as detrimental as the presence of negative ones, and I think that at least in the clinical world, that recognition is starting to take hold. So it's worked in couples therapy, yes!

**That's great news. Okay, do you think that people who study positive psychology are more or less happy than the general population?**

I actually don't think that we're any more or less happy, but I think we take happiness much more seriously, if that makes any sense. I think we recognize the importance of these positive processes a little bit more and so we spend more time thinking about them; we worry about them when they're absent, and we treasure them a little bit more when they're present. But I don't think overall the outcome is that we're more or less happy, we just pay more attention to something like happiness.

**So this particular edition of the book is about exceptional women in the field, as I mentioned earlier. Do you have any thoughts about the gender balance in the field of positive psychology, or in the contribution of women in advancing the field?**

I think that just like any academic discipline or any scientific discipline, there is a gender imbalance, especially at the top levels of our field. This is historically not just our field but it's in many fields. But I'm starting to see from the mid-career level down that there's much more of a gender balance. Women and other underrepresented groups – I don't have any scientific data on this – seem to be much more prominent and higher in numbers, and there seems to be less of an imbalance. After seeing your question I thought about why this might be. I actually want to give a lot of credit to the early founders of positive psychology, people like Ed Diener, Marty Seligman, Mike Csikszentmihalyi, who made a very drastic decision when they started thinking about positive psychology and where they were going to put their money for grants and research. They really focused in those early days on early career psychologists, and this is where there isn't a gender imbalance. For people coming out of graduate school, there's more gender equity. I think that giving their support during that early stage is reaping its benefits in a secondary way. In that sense it was very healthy for the field because you got a lot of enthusiastic people who were at the early stage of their career contributing to this field of positive psychology. But I also think a secondary benefit of this is that it offered support to women when they needed it the most, which is at that early career stage when the pipeline starts to become quite "leaky," so to speak, and women tend to drop out at a rate higher than men. So I think that was a secondary benefit and I think we're starting to see the benefit of that. I don't even know if it was their intention or not, but even if it was a secondary outcome it is just fine with me.

**So potentially we might see it shift further in the next 10 to 15 years at those more senior levels?**

I think so, absolutely.

**If you could give one piece of advice for aspiring positive psychology researchers or practitioners, what would it be?**

That's a tough one. Taking seriously some of what we know in positive psychology, is to find something you really feel passionate about and a topic you're really interested in, and it will never ever seem boring. Even the most detail-oriented late-night data crunching sessions where you're trying to code variables, and do multi-level modeling – or whatever all the boring stuff is – it will never feel boring because it's always on the quest to find the answers to your passionate question. I think that some of the work that's shown us that really loving what you do is important, is absolutely something we should apply to ourselves.

**Is that your early work in Self-Determination Theory coming out there?**

Yes! (Laughs). Make sure you're intrinsically motivated! Exactly.

**What would you say your favorite positive psychology resource is of any kind, so TED talks, books, articles, or whatever it might be?**

There are so many wonderful resources out there but I have to say that time and time again I go back to that early edited volume: Wellbeing: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology. It's an edited volume by Kahneman, Diener and Schwartz and it's got great early chapters in there, and often when I start thinking about something new or even revisiting an older idea, I go back to that edited volume to see what someone had to say about whatever topic that is. There's a lot of wonderful books out there now but maybe it's nostalgia that I often first go back to that volume to see what they said about it.

## Lisa Sansom

Lisa Sansom is a certified leadership coach who is also a skilled trainer, speaker and consultant. Her first career was as a high school French teacher. This means that Lisa still has a great passion for education and that she is afraid of nothing. Lisa's second career, after completing her MBA, is in organizational development. Lisa has worked on projects such as employee engagement, leadership competencies, 360 leadership assessments, leadership development, change management for different programs and other topics that she found to be quite interesting. As a trainer, Lisa has presented to diverse corporate audiences on effective interpersonal communication, how to lead change, introduction to coaching skills, leading high performance teams, and many other different leadership skills and traits. Lisa's third career, which is a very apt confluence of all that has come before, is as the owner of LVS Consulting. Lisa specializes in creating positive organizations through her speaking, training, coaching and consulting, working with individuals, teams, managers and leaders. Lisa now works in organizational development at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. Lisa incorporates positive psychology into all aspects of her work. Lisa is a founding board member of the Canadian Positive Psychology Association where she serves in the role of Vice Chair.

### **How did you decide that you wanted to pursue a master's degree in positive psychology?**

My journey is in common with a lot of people's experience. It was a little bit of a fluke and it was a little bit of calling. Several years ago in 2000, as I was doing my MBA, I was looking for a job and I found out about this field called organizational development. I thought it was really cool and I ended up getting a job in organizational development. Once I got into organizational development, I learned about the field of coaching and I thought, "That's really neat". So I started subscribing to coaching newsletters. We ended up moving to a new city, so I opened my own business and sent myself to coaching school to become a certified coach. Then through one of the coaching newsletters, I heard about this field of positive psychology which sounded very intriguing. Then I found out about the MAPP [Masters of Applied Positive Psychology] program at the University of Pennsylvania and I called my husband over and said, "Hey, there's this really neat MAPP program. I would love to do this." He said, "Oh, it's at University of Pennsylvania – isn't that an Ivy League university?" So I said, "Oh, really! Well, then I really have to go!" I am Canadian and we don't do the "Ivy League" here, so I thought that would be a neat experience too. Once I started looking at the reading list, I realized I'd already read half the books and I was familiar with so many of the authors and I didn't even know that this was an actual field of research

and study. That's how I ended up getting to the master's degree. I just kept following these opportunities. When I did my MBA, I thought, "Okay, that's it, I am done". Then when I did my coaching, I thought, "Okay, that's it, now I am done". Then I did the positive psychology masters, and I really feel like this is where I belong. This is such a great place to be. It's such a great community. It's such a great field. It just worked out so well for me. I am really quite fortunate that way.

**You describe yourself as a "positive interventionist". Could you elaborate the term in your own words? How do you actually positively intervene and who are your targets of intervention?**

"Positive interventionist" is a term that I came up with during the MAPP program or maybe slightly thereafter. I think it was inspired by something James Pawelski said. At that time I was struggling, like a lot of people, with what to call myself because I am not a psychologist; I don't have a psychology background. I am not a practicing psychologist. I don't like the term "happiness" too much because not everything that I do is about happiness, so I came up with the term "positive interventionist". The way I like to think about it is that I work predominantly with business leaders, managers, teams and professionals, and they have many things in their work that they are going to do anyways. They're going to have meetings anyways. They're going to get together as a team. They're going to work on projects. They're going to do performance reviews. They're going to have difficult conversations about projects and about work attitudes and everything. So what's the way to do this in a way that energizes people, grows people and maintains relationships – instead of slapping people down and making workplaces difficult? Being a positive interventionist isn't a layer-on. This isn't like a flavor of the week. This isn't like, "Go away and do personality assessments or strength assessments". This really is integrating better practices for the betterment of everyone in the workplace into the business things that you are doing anyways. This really should be about how you approach the work and how you approach the people, not just an extra layer on top.

**As a positive interventionist, one of your primary goals would be to create positive organizations. What is your definition of "positive organizations"? In other words, what are some defining characteristics of positive organizations, in your opinion?**

As for the characteristics of positive organizations, I like hearing what people say. David Cooperrider talks about – what's the water cooler talk? What do people say about your organizations? What are the stories people tell about working there? Are they mostly positive stories or are they mostly negative stories? I think of a positive organization as one where people share mostly positive stories about working there, about their callings, about the work they do, and about the interactions that they have

with other people. Work is mostly an energizing place to be. I also like the work Kim Cameron is doing around positive leadership and how a positive leader is someone who leaves you energized. When you leave their presence, you have more energy and more enthusiasm and things are better because you had an interaction with them. Those are some of the key characteristics of positive organizations.

**Do you base any of your interventions on academic research? If so, how does a body of relevant research help your work?**

Research substantiates a lot of what I do. I really love Jane Dutton's work on high-quality connection. I love Kim Cameron's work on positive energy for leadership, and I draw a lot on that, as well as David Cooperrider's. It may not be quite the same as psychological research, as some of it might be more grounded research. But when I can tell my clients, "Oh, there's a case study and here is what happened," or, "Psychological research says that gratitude is really important," or, "It's really important to catch people doing things right," which is a big theme of mine, then I think that research definitely grounds and solidifies what it is that I am going to tell people.

**What are some characteristics of research that helps your work most? In other words, if you want to give a piece of advice to academic researchers out there who feel passionate about making differences with their research, what would it be?**

I would love to see researchers do more research in a work context instead of just personal contexts. The other thing I would say is: it is okay to criticize. Please criticize other research, but let's not just tear it down for the sake of tearing it down. There are some people out there and all they do is criticize and tear down. We do need a constructive dialogue around the research, so give suggestions, give ideas. Don't just shoot things down. It is really easy to be a critic, yet it's really hard to build and be constructive. If all you do is make yourself look smart by making other people look dumb, you are not really advancing the field at all.

**What are the most common issues that you see arise in the organizations that make them not so "positive"? And what seems to help resolve them most effectively?**

There's a big question around how to have difficult conversations. We know that we need to talk about poor performance or standards not being met, and people tend to avoid those conversations. A lot of harm comes when we try to avoid or when we try to keep secrets. I am a big fan of transparency. Let's talk about things honestly and respectfully. Let's understand that everybody has individual needs and

preferences. We can still have those hard conversations. I also draw on research by the Harvard negotiations project to help people talk about those difficult things, and their work is really fabulous. Once you get back to what people are really interested in, once you have that empathy and compassion for where they are coming from as an individual, it makes the conversations a lot better and you can still keep the relationships positive and constructive even as you are talking about really difficult things.

**How would you describe the relationship between the wellbeing of individuals within an organization and the wellbeing of an entire organization? From your own experiences, do you think they always go together in the same direction? That is, if we promote the wellbeing of individuals, does that translate into higher organizational wellbeing or vice versa?**

Generally speaking, I am going to say “yes,” but there’s a big caveat around that, as you know that “organization” is more than just the sum of the people in it. We can fairly easily support the wellbeing of individuals. There’s been some research showing that wellbeing has to be multi-faceted. If all we do, for example, is promote physical wellbeing (which is what a lot of organizations do) but then the organization doesn’t change its policies, or the organization trains its managers in how to promote wellbeing or how to conduct meetings differently but don’t change their performance review or incentive processes, then nothing’s going to change organizationally. All these people are now going to feel that, “Oh, it’s just up to me, but I am alone at this. Nobody’s supporting me in this. The organization is still expecting 60-hour work weeks. The organization is still expecting individual achievement at the cost to the team. The organization is still expecting that I am going to work without seeing the meaning in it.” So, yes, we do want to promote the wellbeing of individuals but there has to be a systematic organizational look at: What are the policies in place? What are we rewarding? What’s the conversation around this? And who are we promoting? Because who we promote says a lot about what we value. You absolutely have to have those organizational-level discussions as well. I think it is a Peter Drucker quote that suggested something like: if you are not paying attention to your culture and if you are not deliberately tending to your culture in your organizational practices, then individual wellbeing isn’t going to do anything positive for your organization at all.

**When do you feel most rewarded working as a positive interventionist?**

I really love it when somebody gets it, you know that light bulb moment when the light bulb goes on in somebody’s head. I remember one time I was working with a manager. She was having difficulty with one of her direct reports and we came up with a plan where she was going to do more involvement, more supportiveness and more planning with this employee. The next time I met her, she said, “Oh, it

worked so well. We've improved our relationship and I am so happy with the initiative that this person is now showing." It was so amazing because it was really a relatively small change in how this manager was approaching the situation but it was a total light bulb moment for her because she never thought of it before. That's when I feel most rewarded, as I see somebody else getting elevated and I see their light bulb going on.

**What is the most difficult challenge that you have faced as a positive interventionist? How do you try to overcome it?**

The most difficult challenge goes back to what I was saying before. It is when I get invited to come in and do an event – for example, a training, a team retreat, or a one-day something – and then they think that that's going to change them. What happens is they go back to the organization and nothing else has changed and there is no support for them to change. It is nice to spend that seven hours together but that's it – that's all that they are getting out of it. What I really want to see is more managers and more organizations paying attention to the process of change, the time it takes to change, the support that is needed for change, and how we have to take a look at some of the systems to see if they really do support or go against the change. The biggest challenge is really embedding this awareness into the way that people do things. All of that takes time and deliberate attention, and most people in most organizations are focused on just getting their job done. They really don't have time to pick their heads up and actually do something systematically different.

**Any advice to people who are interested in becoming a coach in organizational development?**

My first piece of advice is to go through proper coach training. I know that sounds obvious but I know a lot of people who call themselves a coach when they are not. They are consultants or advice givers, and that's fine. Just call yourself a consultant or an advice giver. Coaching is a very different discipline, so if you are going to call yourself a coach, you should know what coaching is, and you should go and get the proper training. A lot of organizational development people that I know learn by doing. You can take organizational behavior courses or you can take strategy courses, but really start learning by doing—getting in there, doing the readings and talking to people. Reach out to the community and get to know other people who are coaching and who are in organizational development, and talk to them about what they do. I really do find that people in this field are very generous. They are very kind and sharing. Yes, of course there is competition for business, but people know what they are good at and they know what they can share. I've partnered on a lot of proposals, lots of people have given me ideas,

and I've shared ideas with lots of people; it's a very sharing community. So I would say reach out to it.  
Be part of it.

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## Selected Positive Psychology Resources

### Online Wellbeing Assessments

- [www.workonwellbeing.com](http://www.workonwellbeing.com) (free general wellbeing assessments)
- [www.aweschools.com](http://www.aweschools.com) (school wellbeing assessments)
- [www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires.aspx](http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires.aspx) (strengths, happiness and other positive constructs)
- [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org) (free strengths assessments)
- [www.capeu.com](http://www.capeu.com) (strengths assessments)

### Positive Psychology Associations

- [www.ippanetwork.org](http://www.ippanetwork.org) (International)
- [www.enpp.eu](http://www.enpp.eu) (European network)
- [www.positiivinenpsykologia.fi](http://www.positiivinenpsykologia.fi) (Finland)
- [www.positivepsychology.org.uk](http://www.positivepsychology.org.uk) (UK)
- [www.positivepsychology.org.nz](http://www.positivepsychology.org.nz) (New Zealand)
- [www.globalcppa.org/en/index.html](http://www.globalcppa.org/en/index.html) (China)
- [www.positivepsychologycanada.com](http://www.positivepsychologycanada.com) (Canada)
- [www.ipositive-education.net](http://www.ipositive-education.net) (International)

### Online Articles, Overviews, Blogs and Information

- [www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu)
- [www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)
- [www.positivepsychologynews.com](http://www.positivepsychologynews.com)
- [www.fulfillmentdaily.com](http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com)
- [www.positivepsychologyprogram.com](http://www.positivepsychologyprogram.com)

### Free Positive Psychology Programs

- [www.thetuesdayprogram.com](http://www.thetuesdayprogram.com) (adults)
- [www.biteback.org.au](http://www.biteback.org.au) (teenagers)

## About the Authors

**Dr Aaron Jarden** works part time as a senior lecturer in psychology at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) teaching psychology courses that focus on positive and health psychology, and part time at the Human Potential Centre (a research centre at AUT) supervising masters and PhD students and coordinating research projects on wellbeing. Dr Jarden is president of the New Zealand Association of Positive Psychology, lead investigator of the International Wellbeing Study, co-investigator of the Sovereign New Zealand Wellbeing Index, founder of The Tuesday Program, co-founder and co-editor of the International Journal of Wellbeing, organiser of the international conferences on Wellbeing and Public Policy, founder of Camp Wellbeing, developer of The Adventures Of online wellbeing game, and senior scientist for Work on Wellbeing and Assessing Wellbeing in Education. Dr Jarden describes his goal as “complete understanding of human wellbeing, why it is as it is and how it can be improved”.

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**Dr Gavin Slemm** (Psy.D) is a lecturer, academic and Associate Director of Undergraduate Programs in the Centre for Positive Psychology, University of Melbourne. Here he teaches and coordinates the undergraduate breadth sequence in positive psychology – subjects which have been voted as among the most popular in the university by the students. With a background in organisational psychology and as a registered organisational psychologist (AHPRA), Gavin’s research interests are primarily in the areas of employee wellbeing, wellbeing interventions, autonomous motivation and how people shape their experience of work. Before becoming an academic, Gavin worked in management consulting within the area of HR Advisory for clients in Australia and across the Asia-Pacific.

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**Austin Chia** is an educator, inter-disciplinary researcher and organisational consultant. For over ten years Austin has straddled the domains of professional practice and academia. He is currently a lecturer in management and the Capstone Director of Management Consulting with the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne (UoM). He Holds a Bachelor of Commerce, Honours Degree of Commerce (Organisational Behaviour), Masters of Business and IT and a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology. He is also currently completing his PhD with the Centre of Positive Psychology at UoM

under the supervision of Dr Margaret (Peggy) Kern and Prof. Lea Waters. His PhD topic is on the psychosocial consequences of psychological relationships between organisations and the public.

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**Emilia Lahti** is a researcher and entrepreneur with special interest in applied positive psychology and exponential technology. She has a master's degree in social psychology and a Master of Applied Positive Psychology degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Emilia is a former student of Dr Martin Seligman and pioneered the research on the Finnish construct of *sisu* (extraordinary determination in the face of adversity) under the mentorship Dr Angela Duckworth. She's the founder of the Finnish Positive Psychology Association and recent graduate of the Singularity University Graduate Studies Program located at NASA Ames in Mountain View. Emilia is currently pursuing a PhD at the Aalto University School of Science and Technology in Helsinki and is training to run the length of New Zealand in 2017 for the purpose of raising awareness on violence within families and to empower survivors of domestic abuse. Through her work she seeks to create practical solutions that alleviate human suffering and increase wellbeing on a global scale.

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**Eunbit Hwang** is from South Korea. In June 2012 she graduated from Dartmouth College where she majored in economics. Through her research project as an undergraduate, she investigated how the inequality of subjective wellbeing among different income groups is affected by GDP growth. Her sincere interest in the topic of wellbeing led her to pursue a master's degree in Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, where she wrote a thesis on the relationship between acceptance—a non-judgmental embracement of either one's self and others—and wellbeing under the supervision of Margaret (Peggy) Kern. Her lifelong professional aspiration is to extend the knowledge of positive psychology to an organisational setting. In particular, she wishes to pursue scholarly endeavour on how to design and develop organisations in a way that harmonizes and maximizes the wellbeing of individuals and that of an organisation.

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## Back Cover

What is positive psychology? When, where and how did positive psychology develop? What is it like to use positive psychology applications in the real world of professional practice? How much do helping professionals utilise positive psychology frameworks? Why do some practitioners opt for particular positive psychology applications and frameworks over others? How much do they know about positive psychology? What kind of positive psychology research is being applied in the real world, how and by whom? Who is doing the cutting edge positive psychology research? Where is the field of positive psychology heading, and how is it going to get there? How does positive psychology differ internationally? Are there gender or equity issues in positive psychology?

Positive Psychologists on Positive Psychology (volume 3) explores these kinds of questions and issues by interviewing seventeen female experts in different areas of positive psychology. It also looks at what leads people to become involved in positive psychology, what has happened to their viewpoints over time, and what concerns, hopes and observations they have about this promising developing field. All the interviewees are vastly experienced experts in the field of positive psychology, either because of their research or publication track record, or because they are well known in the positive psychology community either internationally or in their respective countries.

This book is intended to be of interest and use to those who have recently moved into the field of positive psychology or to those who are thinking of doing so. If you would like to know what some of the experts think and are looking for more insight into the field of positive psychology, this book will help.