



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

The future of Positive Psychology

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Indonesian Positive Psychology Association (AP2I)





Outline

- Challenges of the present.
- What the future holds.
- Where is positive psychology going? – What is positive psychology's future?
- How is it going to get there? – Who, how, when?
- Applause or ridicule?

A copy of these slides at: www.aaronjarden.com

The Geelong three breaths exercise

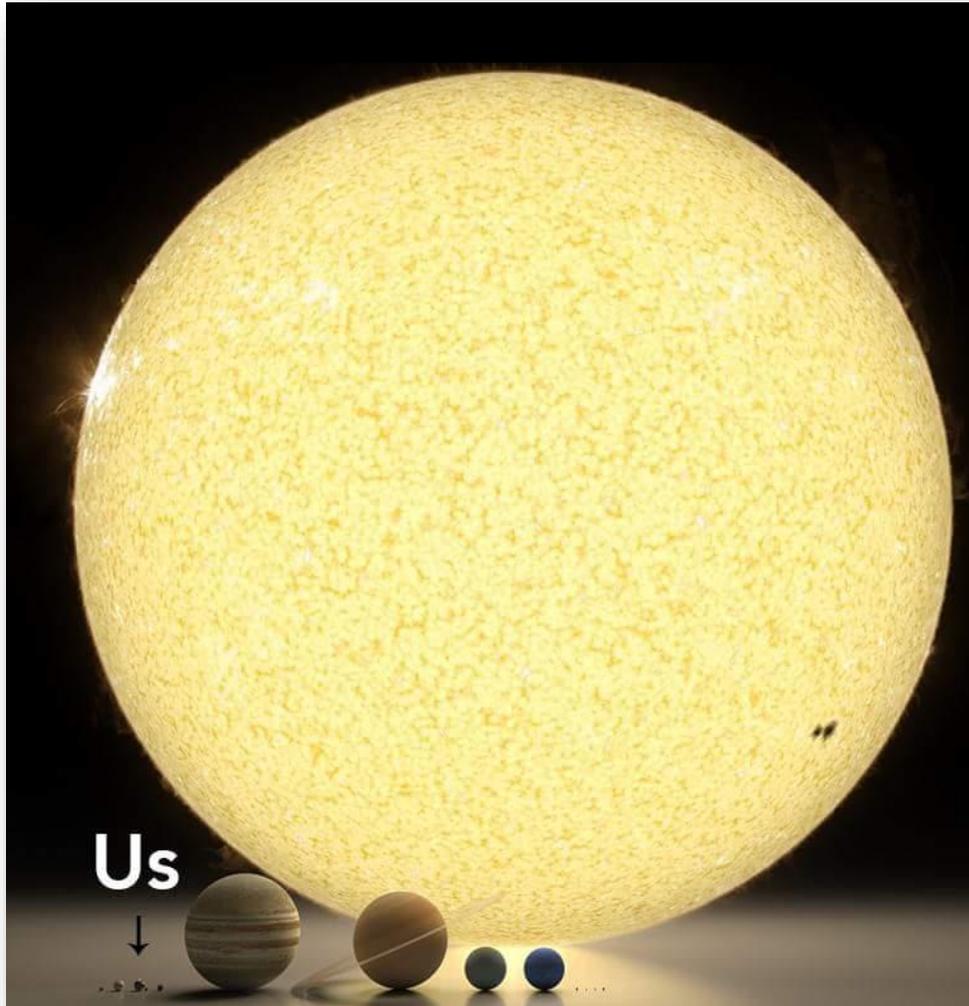
- Breath One. Take a deep breath. Notice **your physical body** and any points of pain or tension. Breath out slowly and release any tension away.
- Breath Two. Take a deep breath. As you breathe out think about what you are grateful for right at this very moment. Say to yourself “**Right now I am grateful for...**”.
- Breath Three. Take a deep breath. As you breathe out think what intentional state you want to be in right now. Say to yourself “**My intention right now is to be** (kind, open minded, relaxed, critical, curious etc)...”.

Developed by Justin Robinson at Geelong Grammar.

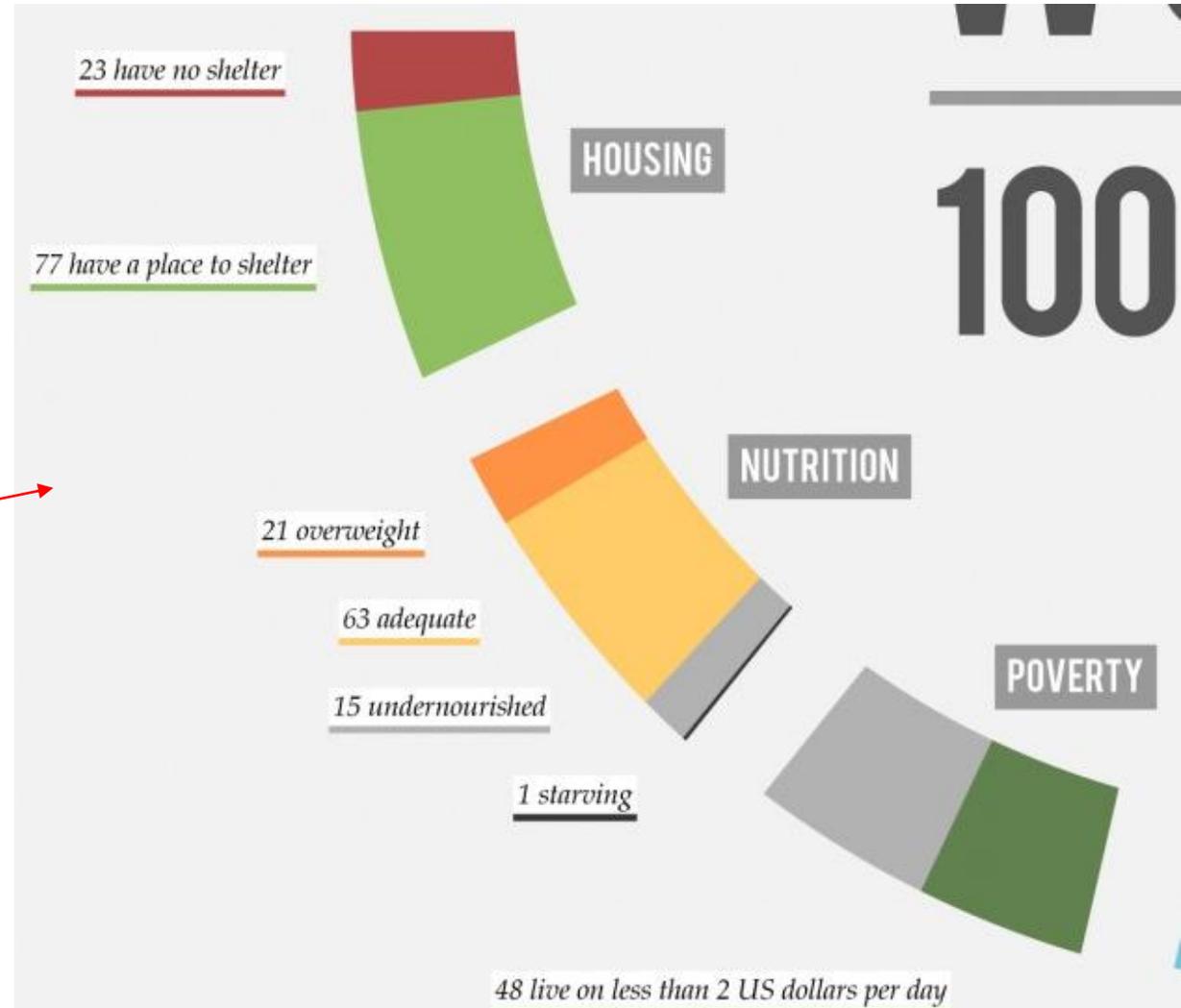


Challenges of the present

7,632,819,325 of us...



Challenges of the present



Challenges of the present

1. Lots of inequality.

- Gender.
- Racial.
- Political.
- Global.
- Social.
- Economic. 
- Educational.
- Technological.
- Inequality of resources.
- Inequality of opportunity.

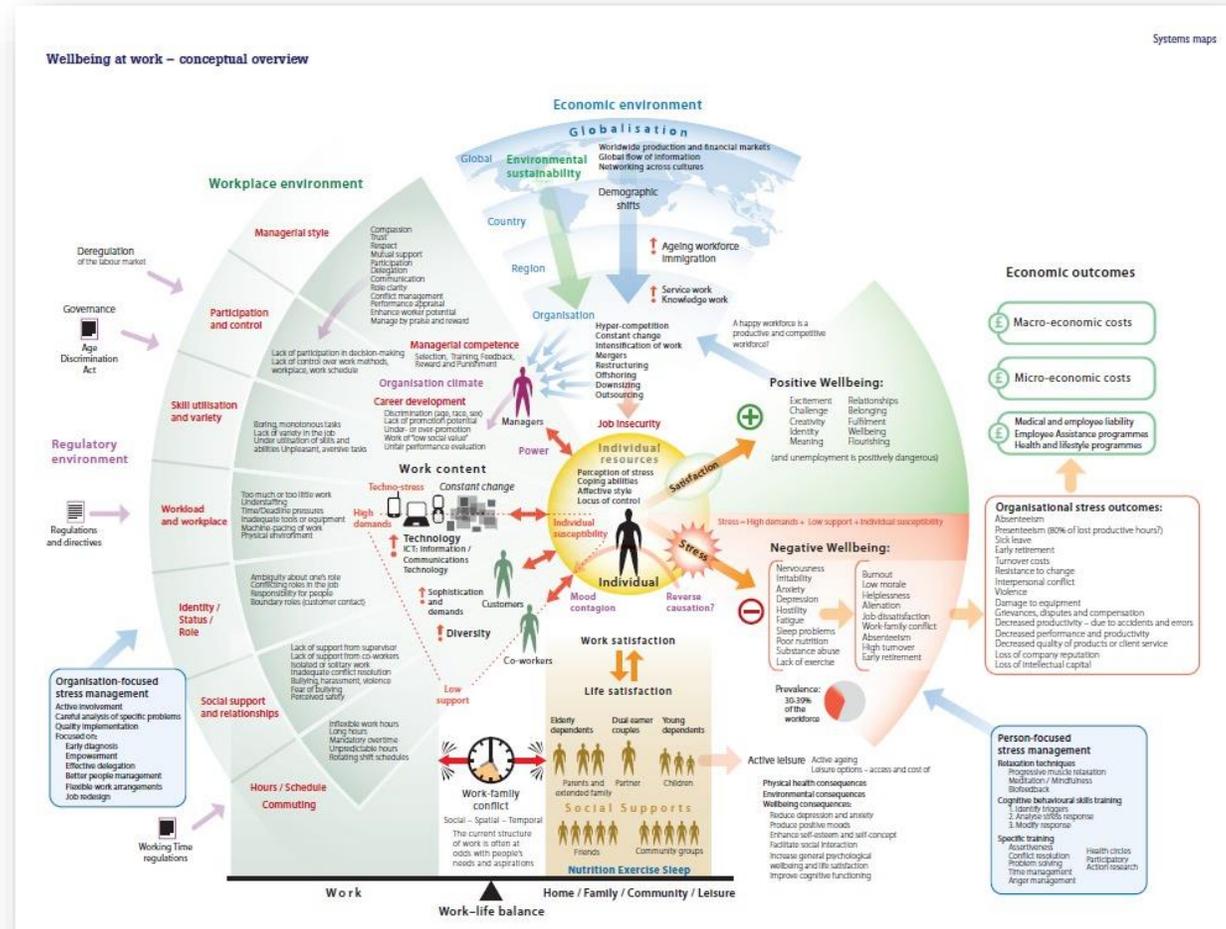


Challenges of the present

2. Lots of complexity.

- At work. →
- Health (mental illness).
- Social.
- Systems (refugees).
- Dark web.
- Rocket science.
- Rate and pace of change. ↓

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



Challenges of the present

3. The earth is changing.

- Global warming. 
- Air quality and pollution.
- Population control issues.
- Famine and food wastage.
- Clean water.
- Species extinction.
- Re-coding life (messing with viruses and DNA).
- Global peace (war, terrorism, democracy - UN).



Challenges of the present

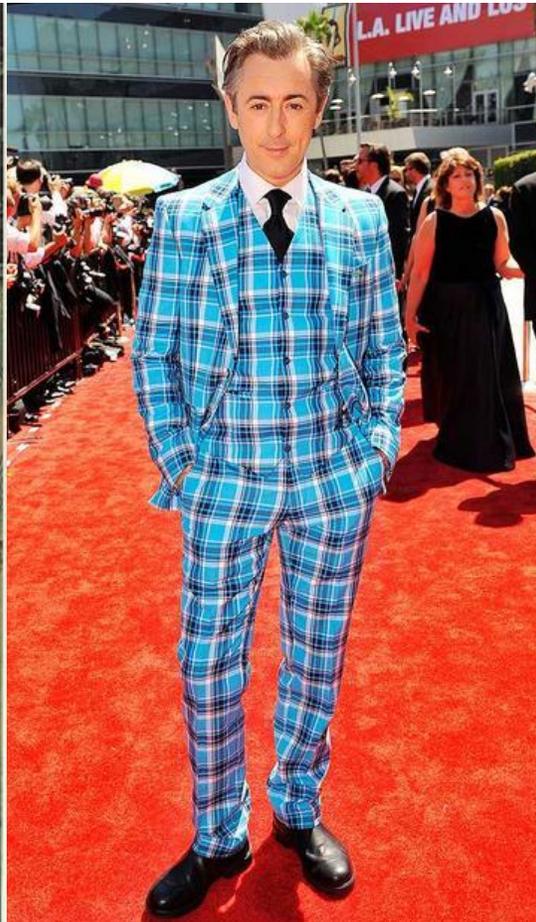
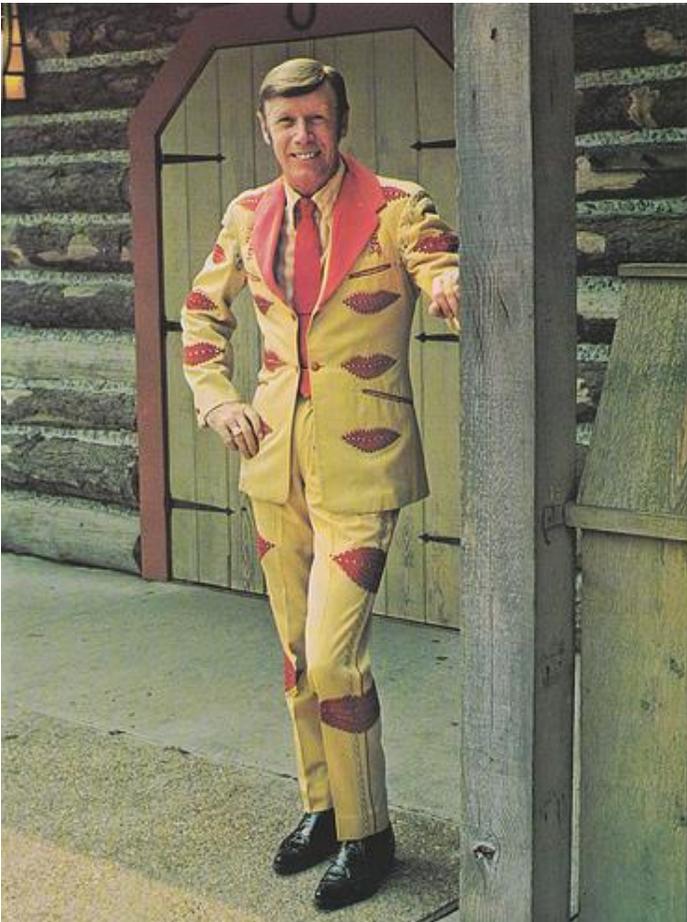
4. A lot of people are not doing well.

- Unhappy. 
 - Stressed.
 - Depressed.
 - Anxious.
 - Lack a sense of meaning and purpose in life.
- Mercer (2011) reported that 50% of employees are unhappy at work.
 - 800,000 people die due to suicide every year.
 - 1.1 billion have a mental or substance use disorder.



Challenges of the present

5. Bad fashion sense.



Challenges of the present

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

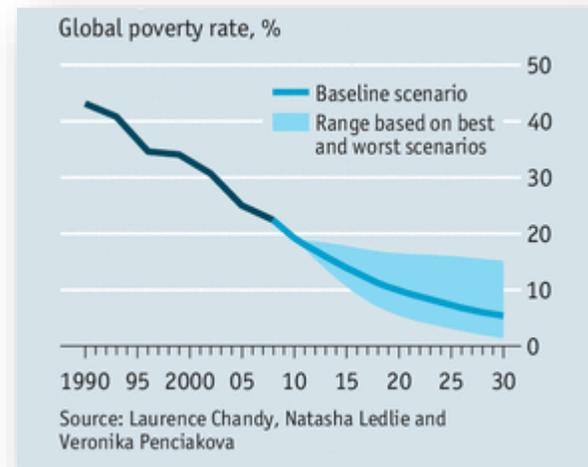
- Increasing inequality.
- Increasing complexity.
- Keeping the earth alive and healthy.
- People not doing well (unhappiness).
- Bad fashion sense... 



Challenges of the present

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

- Remarkable declines in global poverty over the last 40 years...
- Most people are happy... Cross-national data suggest that there is a positive level of subjective wellbeing throughout the world, with the possible exception of very poor societies.
- 75% have phones, 83% can read and write...
- Medical science is impressive...
- Population is growing rather than declining... A problem if declining?
- There are 200 million people less dying of starvation compared to 25 years ago...
- Season 8 of Game of Thrones is coming in 2019 – Winter is coming!





WINTER
IS
COMING

GAME OF THRONES

Challenges of the present

- So to recap, despite living in a world which has major challenges (inequality, completely, etc.), it's not all doom and gloom as good stuff is also happening (decline in poverty, literacy levels increasing, etc.).
- All-in-all, some good stuff and some bad stuff – a little bit of both.





What the future holds

- Personal robots.
- Enhanced communication and knowledge.
- Increased luxury.
- Better transportation.
- Better fashion?





What the future holds

What is almost certain is that it will involve:

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

Are you excited about our future?

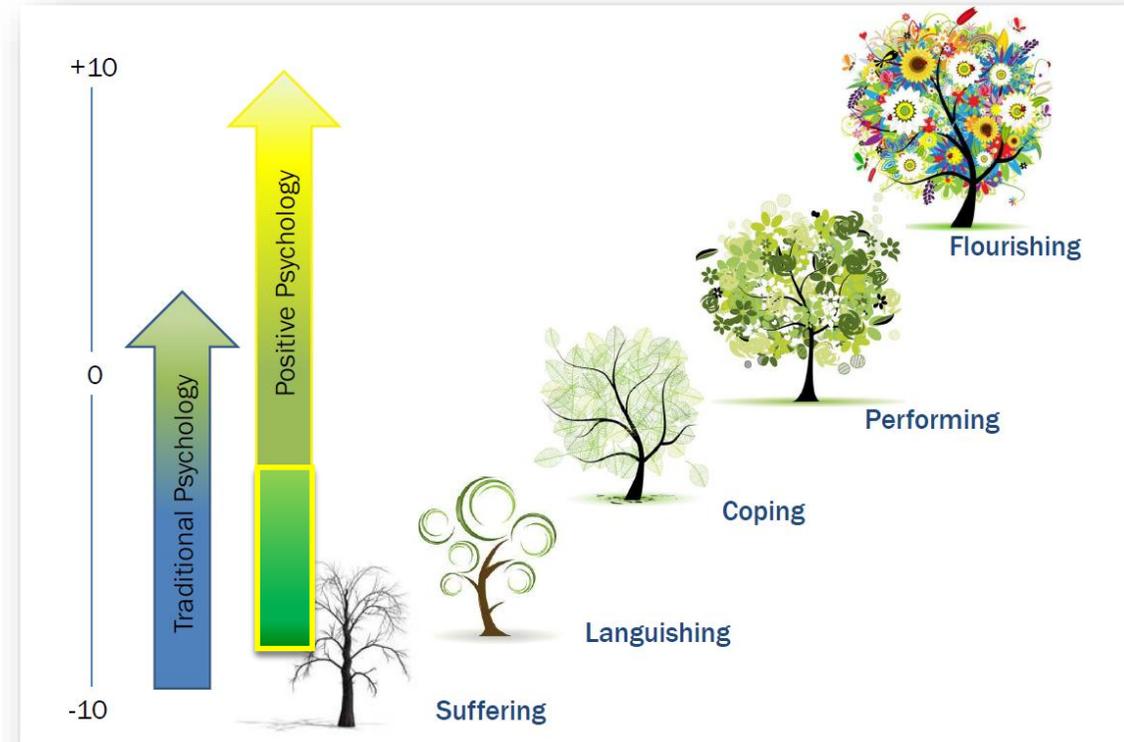
Given what we can reasonably expect to happen in the future, what role can positive psychology play in shaping this future for the better? How can it “**make life better**”?

Where is positive psychology going?

Or address the question: “What is positive psychology's future?”

Firstly though, what is positive psychology?

- Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that conducts scientific inquiry into the factors that help individuals, communities and organisations thrive by building on their strengths and virtues.
- Positive psychology is the study of topics as diverse as happiness, optimism, hope, flow, strengths, meaning, subjective wellbeing and personal growth...
- Positive psychology aims to expand psychology from its focus on repairing the negatives in life to also promoting the positives in life: From what is wrong with individuals to what is right with them.



Where is positive psychology going?

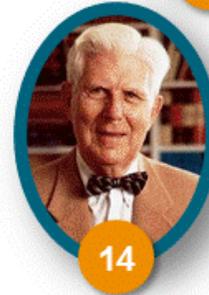
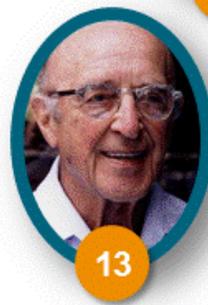
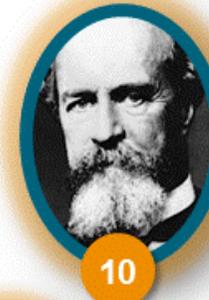
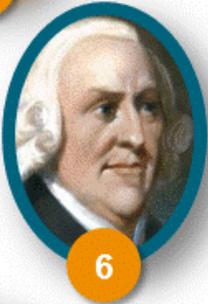
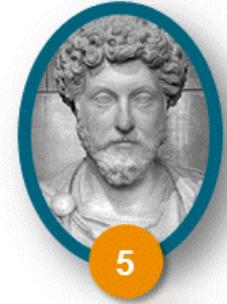
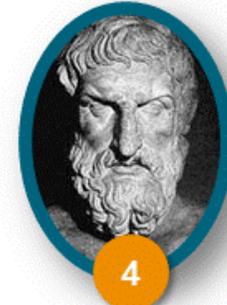
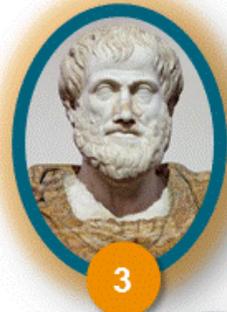
- Positive psychology interventions (empirically validated techniques and strategies to increase wellbeing) have been used effectively in schools to improve academic outcomes, in businesses to improve work relationships and engagement, and in communities to improve health...

What is optimal human functioning?



Where is positive psychology going?

A Positive Psychology Ancestral Portrait Gallery



1) Buddha; 2) Konfuzius; 3) Aristoteles 4) Epiktet; 5) Mark Aurel; 6) Adam Smith; 7) Ben Franklin; 8) John Stuart Mill; 9) Ralph Waldo Emerson; 10) William James; 11) Abraham Maslow 12) Viktor Frankl; 13) Carl Rogers; 14) Aaron Beck; 15) Albert Bandura



Where is positive psychology going?

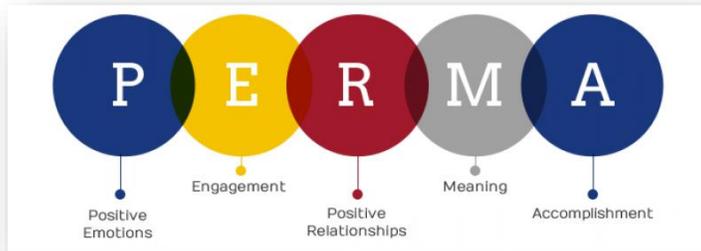
What is the purpose of positive psychology?

- Martin Seligman's view.
- Chris Peterson's view.
- Other key influential positive psychologists.
- Look at journal publications for trends and recommendations.
- Aaron's 10 speculations...

Where is positive psychology going?

Martin Seligman's view:

- Seligman: "Positive Psychology is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play."
- 51 percent of the world could be flourishing by 2051 (33 years).



Flourishing

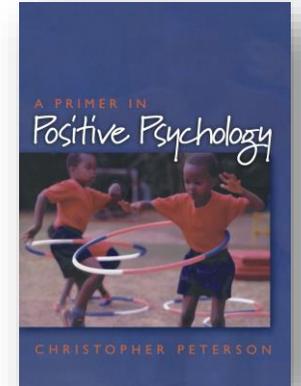
- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Positive relationships
- Meaning and purpose
- Accomplishment / competence



Where is positive psychology going?

Chris Peterson's view:

- Chris Peterson 2006 chapter "The future of positive psychology":
 - Positive psychology will fuse into psychology.
 - The negative will always be appealing.
 - Clarity over hedonic set-points.
 - The components of the good life exist in degrees.
 - Better longitudinal studies needed.
 - How well will interventions generalise and scale.
 - Social settings that will enable the good life.
 - Happy pills are only a matter of time.



Where is positive psychology going?

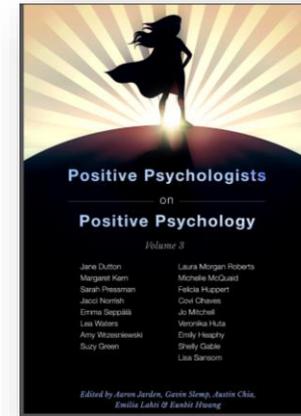
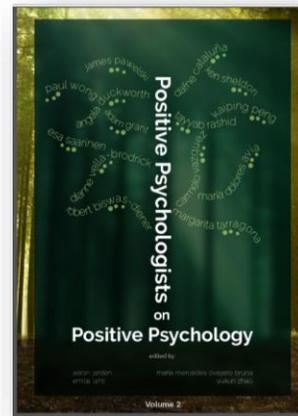
Ask other positive psychologists:

- Book series: Positive Psychologists on Positive Psychology (Vol 1, 2, & 3).
- Free at <https://www.workonwellbeing.com/pponpp3/>
- 44 interviews in total, a selection of 4 from each book:

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- Ed Diener
- Todd Kashdan
- Barbara Fredrickson

- Robert Biswas-Diener
- Paul Wong
- Ken Sheldon
- James Pawelski

- Jane Dutton
- Felicia Huppert
- Veronika Huta
- Lea Waters



Where is positive psychology going?

So what did they say? Themes:

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

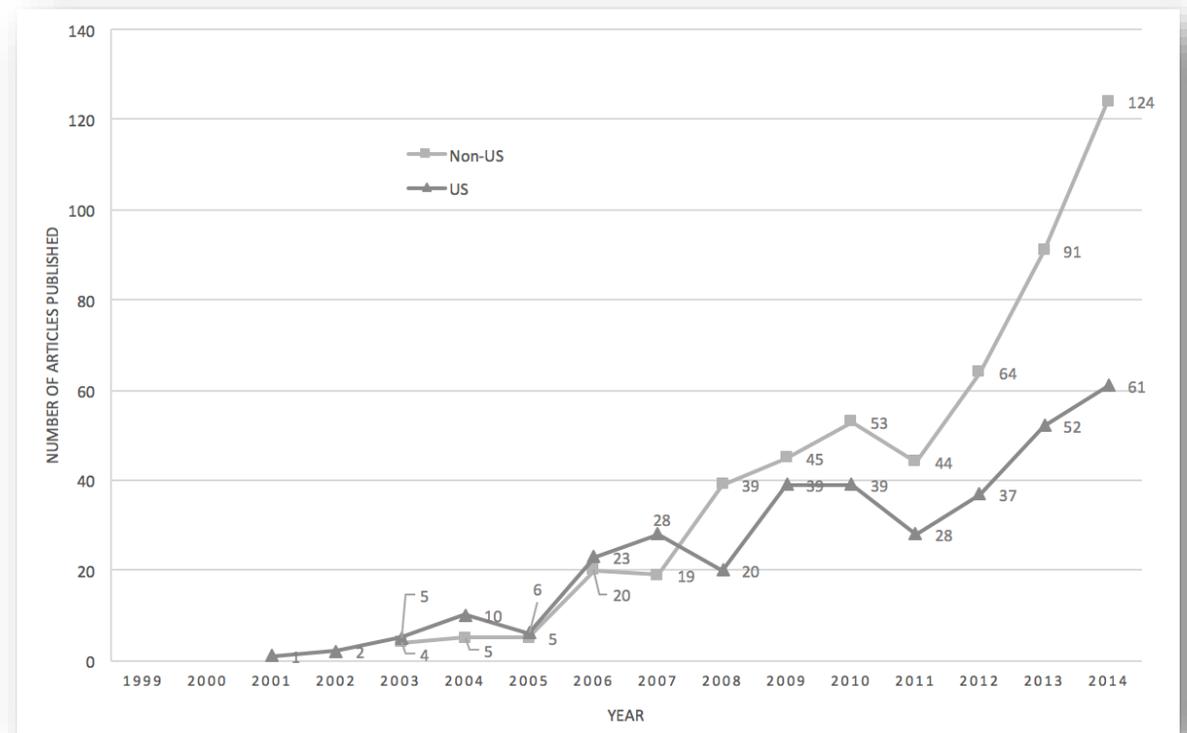
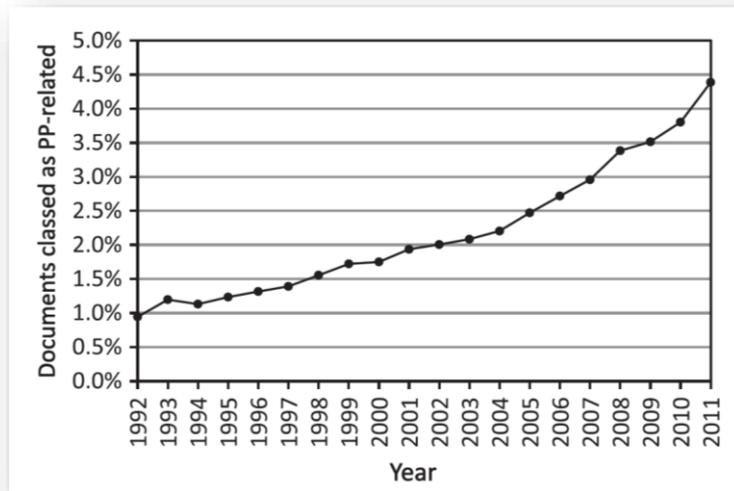


Where is positive psychology going?

What do the publications focus on and recommend?

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

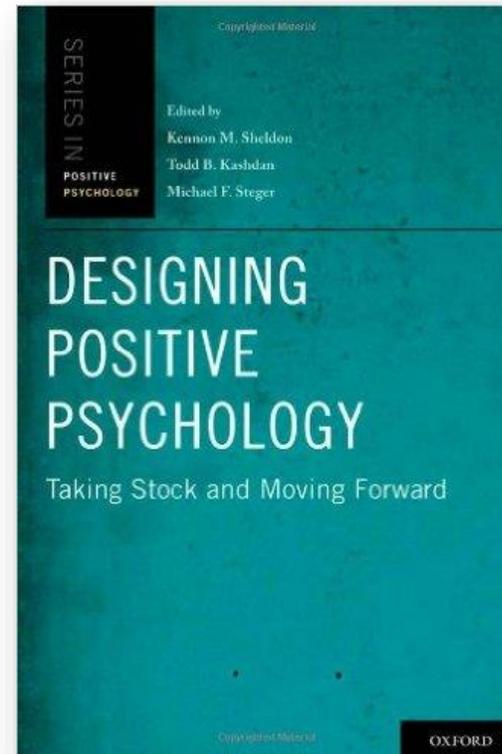
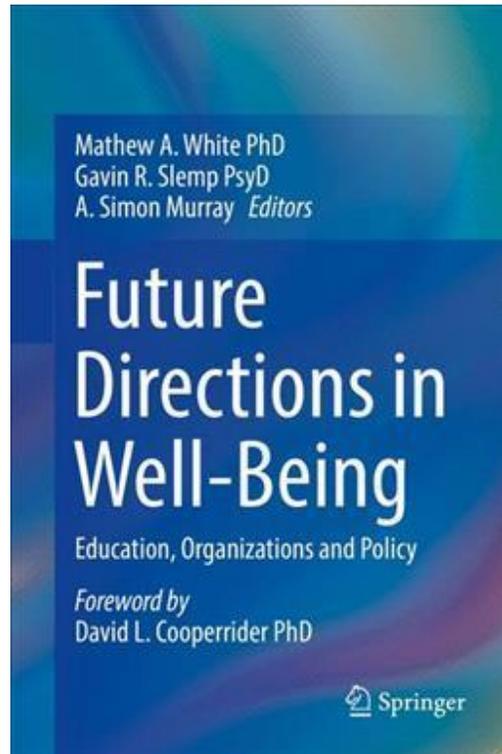
All recommend more research needed.





Where is positive psychology going?

There are other views also:



Where is positive psychology going?

My view of the adventures in store for positive psychology.

- Not so new-ish areas:
 - Positive neuroscience.
 - Positive education.
 - Positive health.
 - Military. →
 - Positive organisations.
 - National accounts of wellbeing.
 - Culture and wellbeing.





Where is positive psychology going?

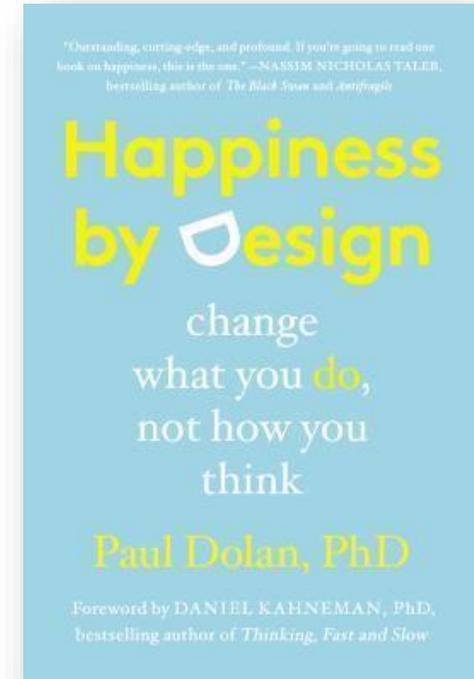
My view of the adventures in store for positive psychology.

- 10 new-ish areas of focus for the future:
 1. Discomfort.
 2. Strategic laziness.
 3. Play.
 4. Sex.
 5. Slowness.
 6. Nature.
 7. Wellbeing technology.
 8. The most disadvantaged.
 9. Physical health and wellbeing.
 10. Positive parenting.

Where is positive psychology going?

My view of the adventures in store for positive psychology.

- If could go beyond ten I would speculate at things like:
 - our **attentional resources** and their impact on wellbeing. →
 - the **media** and wellbeing.
 - urban **design** and wellbeing.
 - **Wellbeing literacy** and wellbeing.
 - **positive therapy**.
 - **sport** and wellbeing.
 - leisure centers (gyms, **cafes**, bars) and wellbeing.
 - criminals and **recidivism**.
 - **retirement** and wellbeing etc.



Where is positive psychology going?

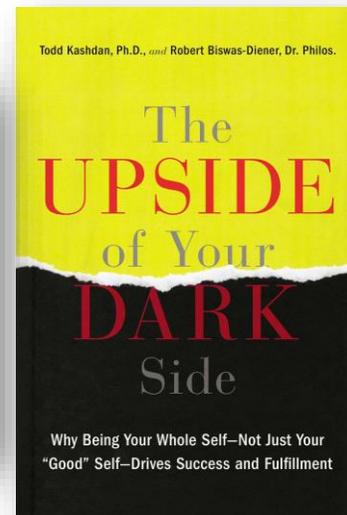
STRETCH



Where is positive psychology going?

1. Discomfort as a pathway to wellbeing:

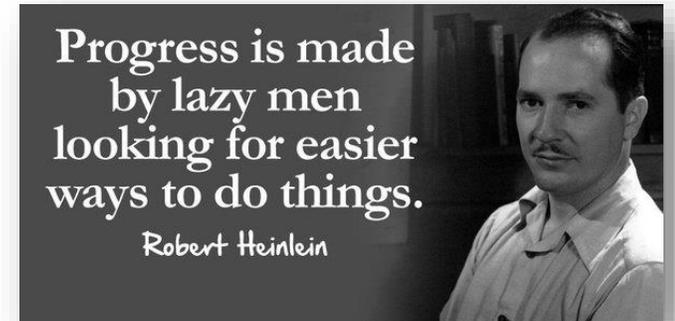
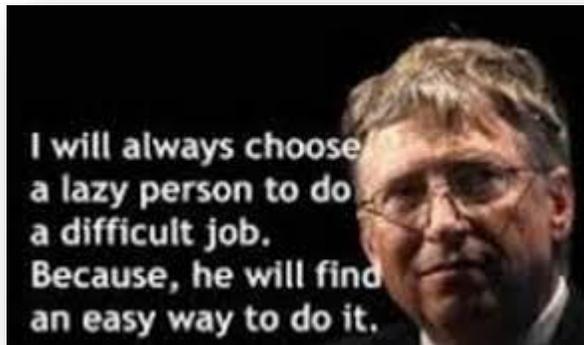
- Embrace and utilise negative emotions.
- Comfort addiction? (technology enabled?)
- See Robert Biswas-Diener youtube talk.



Where is positive psychology going?

2. Strategic laziness:

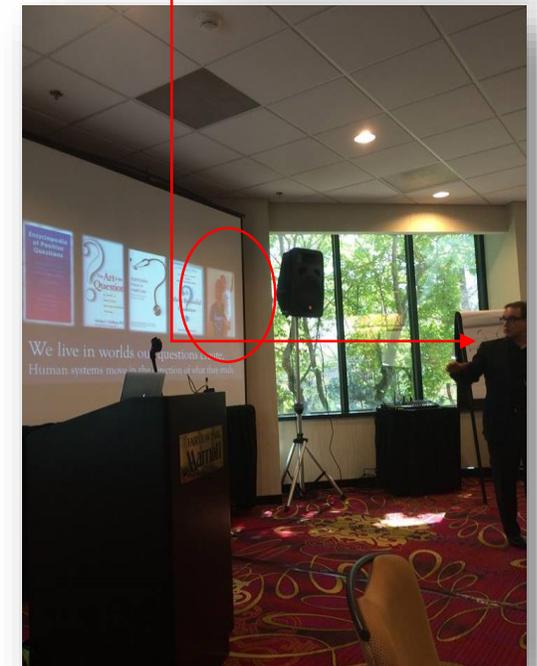
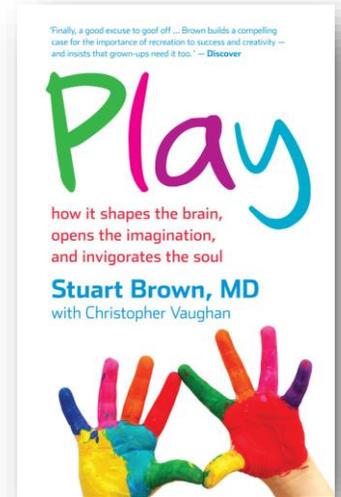
- You can't be good at everything and use your strengths all the time – that's exhausting!



Where is positive psychology going?

3. Play:

- David Cooperrider.
- Kids are good, adults are terrible!



Challenges of the present

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

- Remarkable declines in global poverty over the last 40 years...
- Most people are happy... Cross-national data suggest that there is a positive level of subjective wellbeing throughout the world, with the possible exception of very poor societies.
- 75% have phones, 83% can read and write...
- Medical science is impressive...
- Population is growing rather than declining... A problem if declining?
- There are 200 million people less dying of starvation compared to 25 years ago...
- Season 8 of Game of Thrones is coming in 2019 – Winter is coming!

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Where is positive psychology going?

4. Sex:

- We can't ignore the link between sex and wellbeing.
- Positive emotions as the glue for social disconnect.
- Cue sex video:

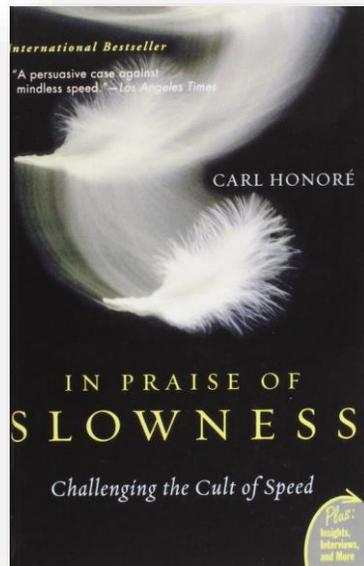


Where is positive psychology going?

5. Slowness:

- Let's experiment – **slow stretch**. →
- Stopping stuff and doing less.
- *“These days even instant gratification takes too long”* – Carl Honore.

STRETCH



Where is positive psychology going?

6. Nature:

- Strong links with:
 - Getting outside and sunlight.
 - Green spaces.
 - Caring for growth.



IJW

Capaldi, C. A., Passmore, H.-A., Nisbet, E. K., Zelenski, J.M., & Dopko, R.L. (2015). Flourishing in nature: A review of the benefits of connecting with nature and its application as a wellbeing intervention. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(4), 1-16. doi:10.5502/ijw.v5i4.449

ARTICLE

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

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

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

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

1. Introduction

From ancient Chinese healers to Western writers such as Henry David Thoreau, the belief that

Where is positive psychology going?

7. Wellbeing technology:

- Remember increasing complexity – humans are the bottleneck.



Where is positive psychology going?

8. The most disadvantaged:

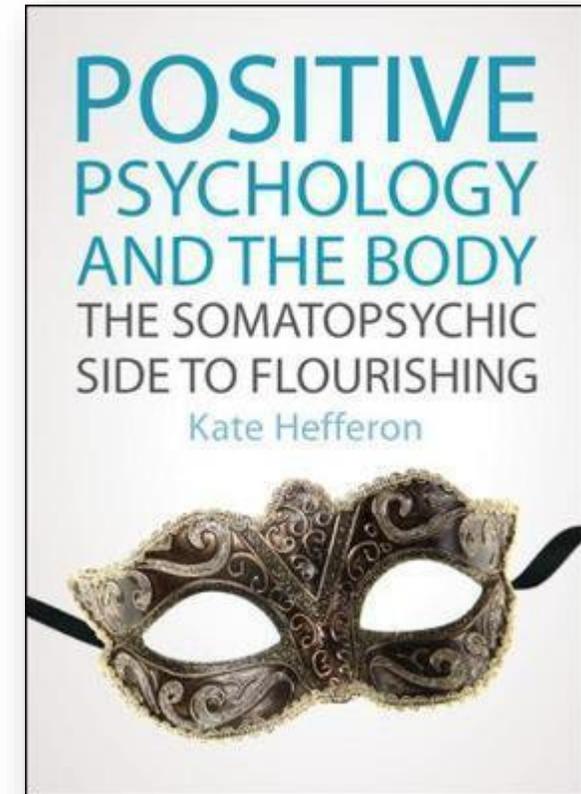
- To increase global wellbeing we need to target the poor and disadvantaged.



Where is positive psychology going?

9. Physical health and wellbeing:

- Eat.
- Move.
- Sleep.
- People who are flourishing are eating well, sleeping well, and moving a lot, and conversely, people who are languishing are not eating well, not sleeping well, and not moving a lot.
- Sovereign Wellbeing Index



Where is positive psychology going?

10. Parenting:

- Positive parenting.
- Free range, risk, and encouraging failure.
- A wise man once told me:

“Love them, keep them safe, teach them stuff...”



Where is positive psychology going?

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

1. Discomfort.
2. Strategic laziness.
3. Play.
4. Sex.
5. Slowness.
6. Nature.
7. Wellbeing technology.
8. The most disadvantaged.
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How is it going to get there?

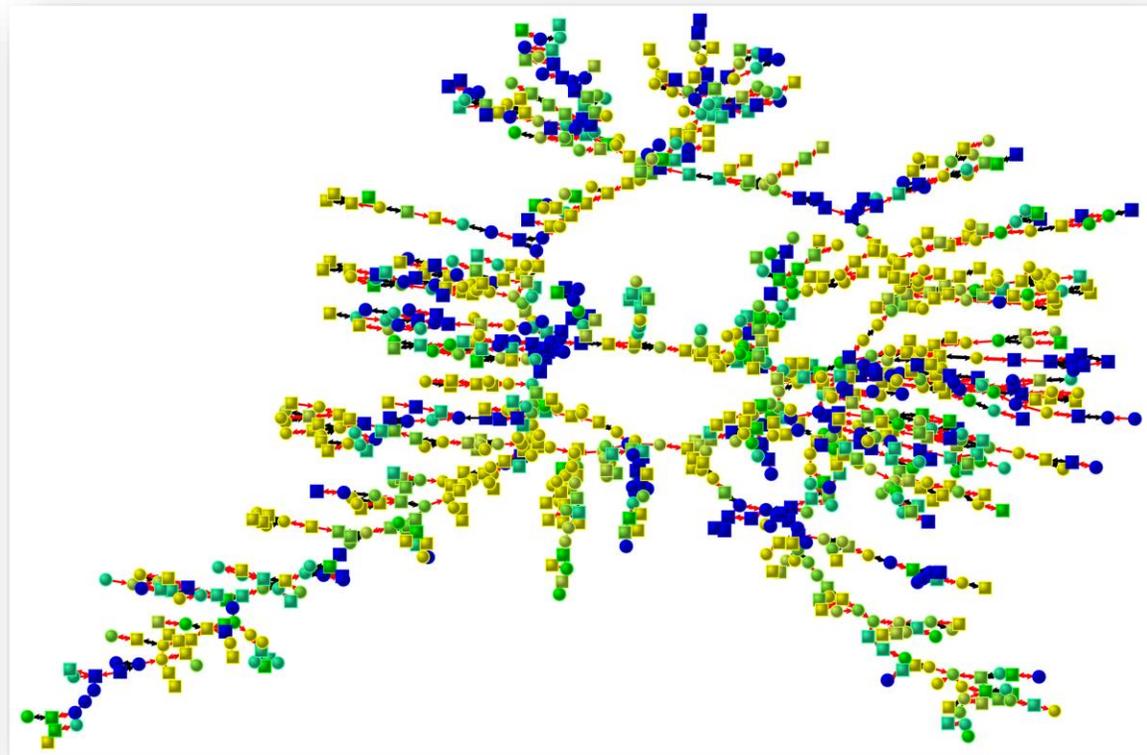
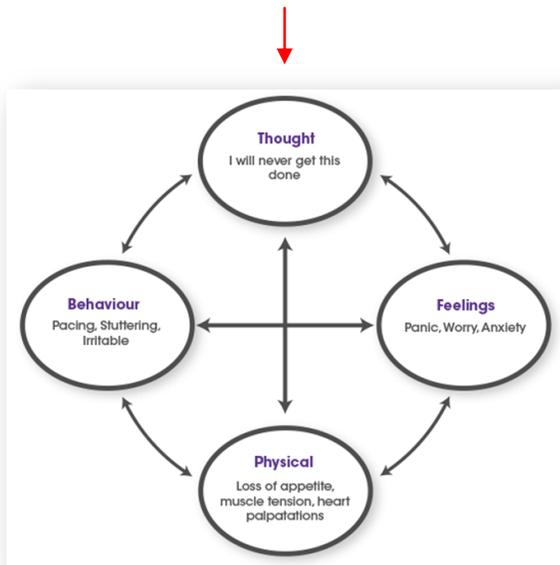
Now I have painted a picture of where positive psychology is likely going, how is it going to get there?

- 10 (mostly new-ish) ways positive psychology can thrive and impact:
 1. Simplifying messaging.
 2. Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory.
 3. Start a movement - beyond academia.
 4. More people (let's teach it), more passion.
 5. Better dissemination: Media, public policy, organisations, schools.
 6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better: supercharge them, focus on the individual.
 7. More collaborative plan.
 8. Address the critics.
 9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology.
 10. Make some friends.

How is it going to get there?

2. Better studies:

- Complex research design – observational data, self-report, biological markers, behavioural data, time-series studies.
- Social network analysis.
- Sophisticated measurement.



How is it going to get there?

3. Start a movement:

- Beyond academia...
- Cue video.

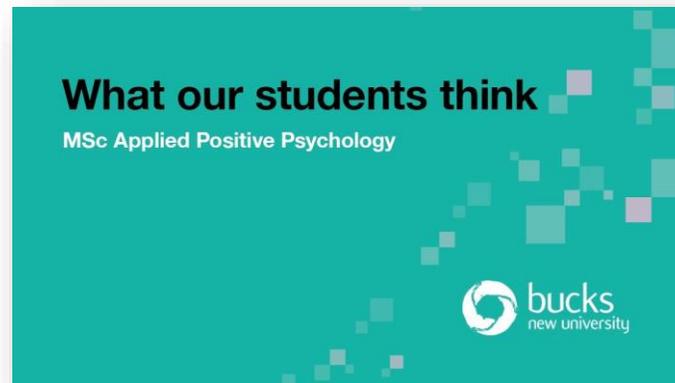
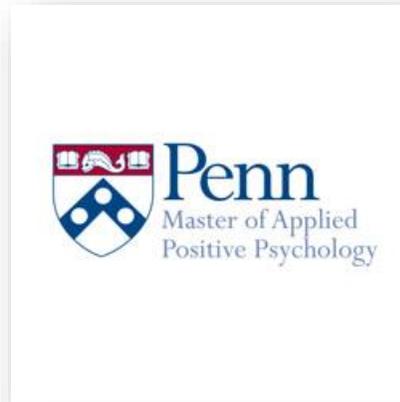




How is it going to get there?

4. More people, more passion:

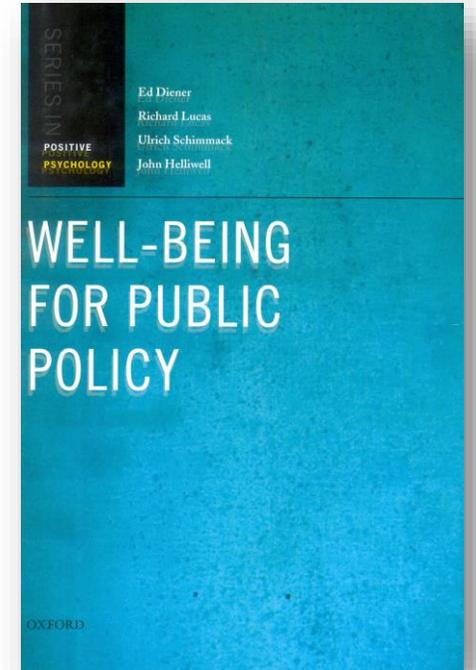
- Let's teach it. 



How is it going to get there?

5. Better dissemination:

- Social media, public policy, organisations, schools. →
- International 'Wellbeing and Public Policy' conference series. ↓



How is it going to get there?

6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better:

- One-size-fits-all interventions. →
- Authentic delivery.
- More experiential learning (activities).
- More group based learning.
- Supportive environments for change.
- Better evaluation.
- Longer term impact (e.g., china).
- Efficacy vs effectiveness.
- Selling false hope.
- Super charge them (e.g., 3 breaths).

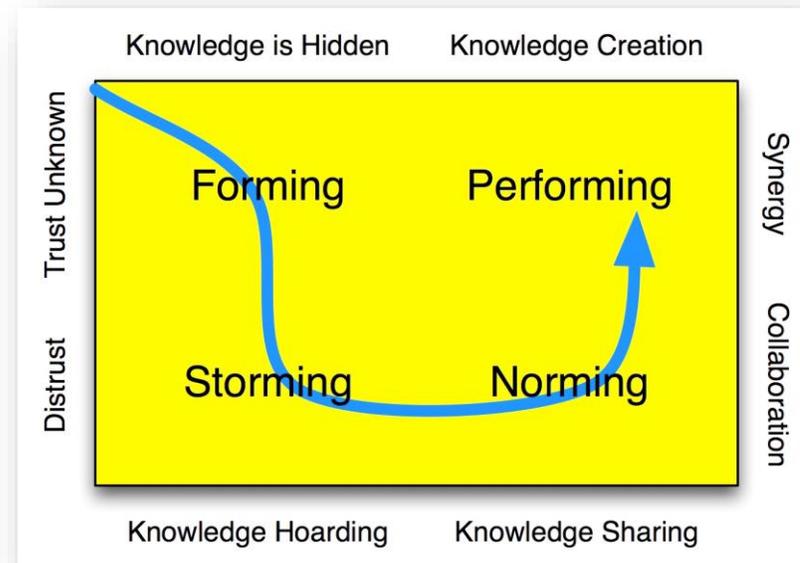
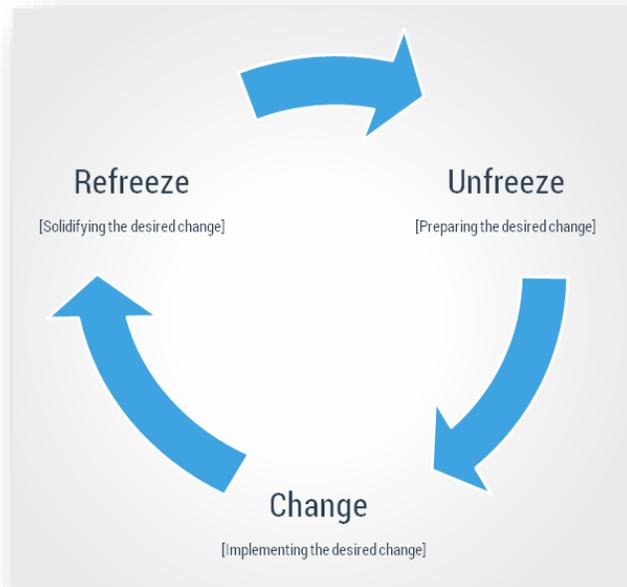
A joyful life is an
individual creation
that cannot be
copied from a
recipe
-
Mihály
Csíkszentmihályi



How is it going to get there?

7. More collaborative plan:

- We needed everyone in the room...
- We need to understand how change happens - **change management frameworks**, and that change is always difficult, even if it is change for the better...
- At the moment we have thrown things up in the air and don't know where they are going to land...

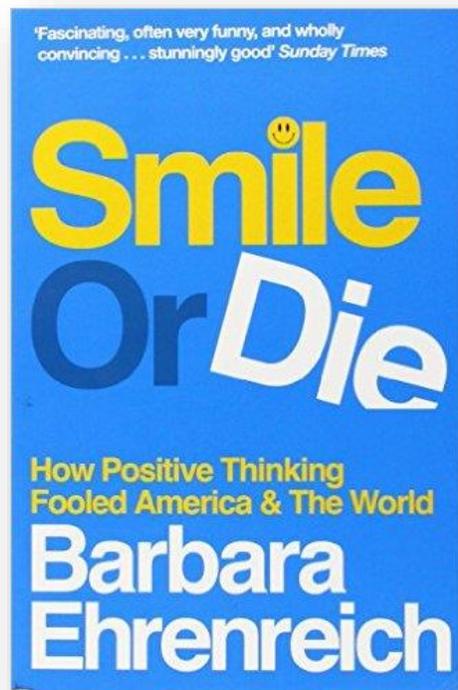


CRITICS

How is it going to get there?

8. Address the critics better:

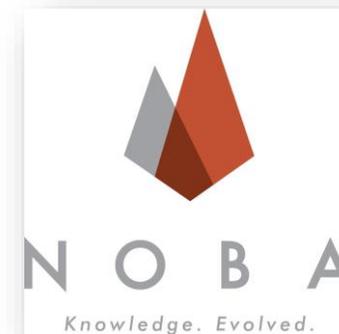
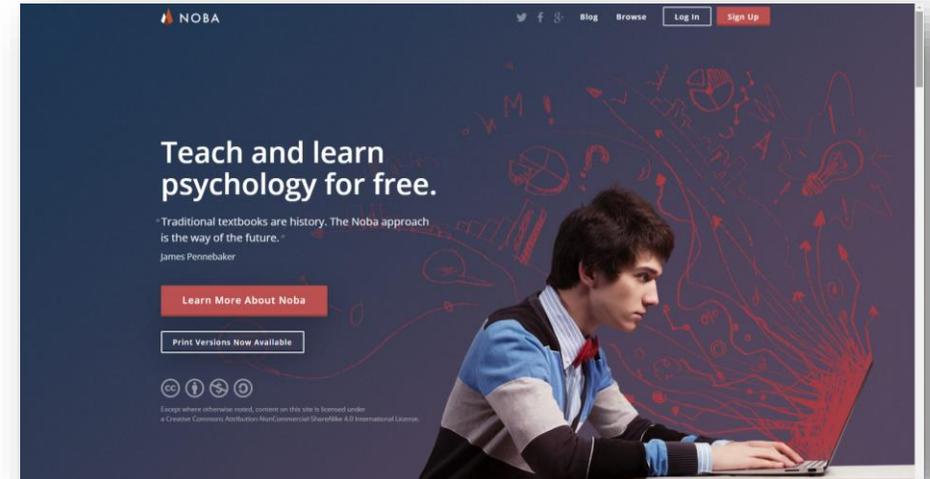
- Regardless of their bad fashion sense. →



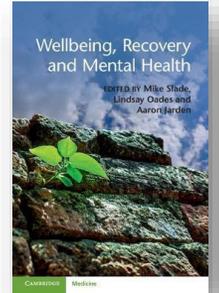
How is it going to get there?

9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology:

- E.g., Noba Project. 
- E.g., Happify, Work on Wellbeing.  



How is it going to get there?



10. Make some friends:

- With the **helping professions**:
 - Slade, M., Oades, L., & Jarden, A. (2016). *Wellbeing, recovery and mental health*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - *“Slade, Oades, and Jarden have fostered a long-overdue conversation within this book – between clinicians focusing on recovery, and positive psychologists focusing on well-being. Although the first group has traditionally focused on returning clients to baseline, the other group has tried to leave the baseline behind, for new heights of well-being. The upshot of the conversation is this: That **the processes bringing recovery and the processes bringing well-being are much the same**, though they have been focused on in isolation”. – Ken Sheldon*
- With **coaching psychologists**:
 - Motivation theories can help us understand how to get the best out of ourselves and others – one of the essential goals of positive psychology.
- With the **social psychologists**:
 - Just because they are fun to hang out with...



How is it going to get there?

So:

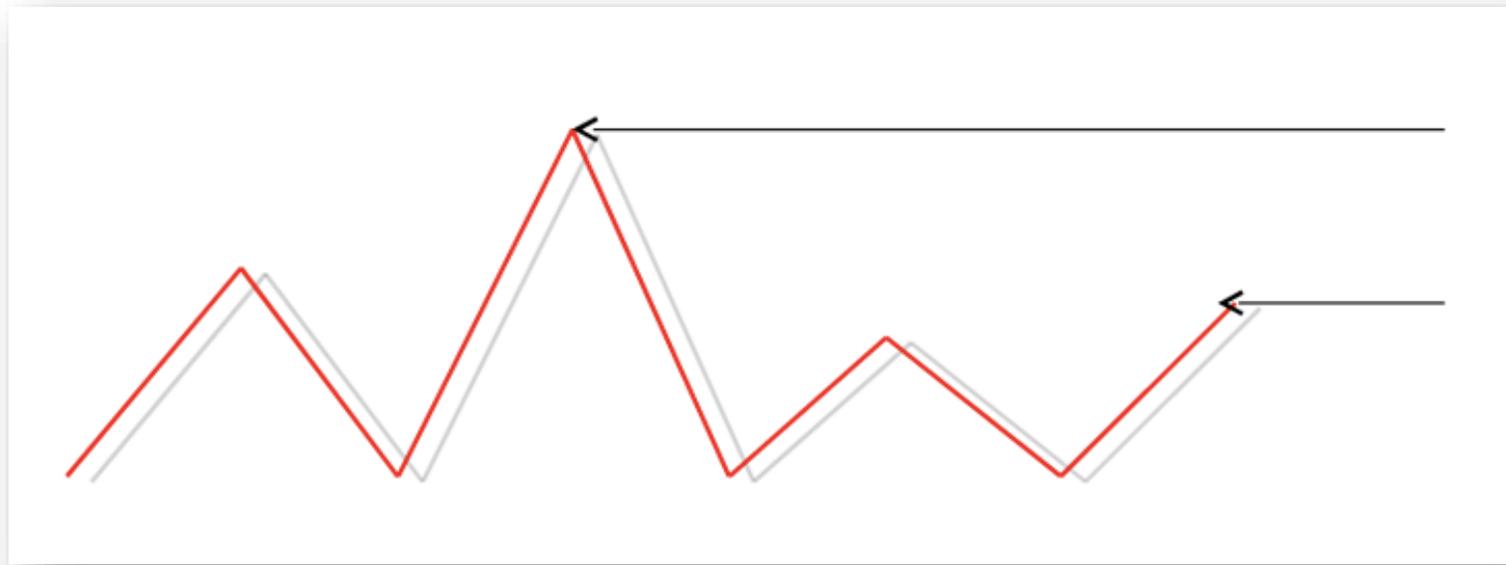
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4. More people (let's teach it), more passion.
5. Better dissemination: Media, public policy, organisations, schools.
6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better: supercharge them, focus on the individual.
7. More collaborative plan.
8. Address the critics.
9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology.
10. Make some friends.

“ We need to focus more on
what success looks like for
positive psychology ”

“ And how this success helps
with real world problems! ”

Summing up...

- Peak-end theory (psychological heuristic) - Barbara Fredrickson & Daniel Kahneman.
- Peak-end theory states that people's judgments of their overall experience (like of this 60 minute talk) is greatly influenced by the peak of their experience, and how it ends. It has to do with our memory of experiences...





Summing up...

- About wellbeing:
 - **The good life** is best construed as a matrix that includes happiness, occasional sadness, a sense of purpose, playfulness, and psychological flexibility, as well autonomy, mastery, and belonging / connection.
 - It's not just about learning to be more positive – it's about using **scientifically-informed tools** and strategies to make our thinking more flexible, accurate, clear, and expansive. This thinking along with effort will lead to happiness and more healthy behaviours.

the *Good* life



Summing up...

- About wellbeing (Peterson, 2006):

Zero to small correlations with happiness and life satisfaction, and with:

- Age
- Gender
- Social class
- Income
- Having children
- Ethnicity
- IQ
- Physical attractiveness

Moderate to large correlations with happiness and life satisfaction, and with:

- Gratitude
- Optimism
- Being employed
- Frequency of sexual intercourse
- Self-esteem
- Number of friends
- Being married
- Religiousness
- Level of leisure activity
- Physical health
- Internal locus of control

Summing up...



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



Summing up...

- And of course, good fashion sense...



Summing up...

- About positive psychology:
 - I think we have gone from “good” to “not good” to “not good enough” (as Seligman said) to “maybe, not bad”. There is still a long way to go to “awesome” and 51% flourishing.
 - There are many new areas of focus (the body, comfort addiction, etc.) that will come into the research agenda which is exciting.
 - With regard to building a better future for the world and positive psychology, if we simplify our messaging, design better studies, teach about our topic more widely, go beyond academia, focus on how we disseminate our messages, tailor our interventions better, front to the critics, embrace technology, and make some conceptual friends, this is a good way to get there and make an impact on some of our global challenges.



Summing up...

- Let's **think big**, be **bold**, be **creative**, be **authentic**, and most of all be **collaborative**.
- Sure we all have problems, but there are a lot of things on the horizon to be optimistic about and hopeful for – both for humans and for positive psychology.





**Questions?
(applause or ridicule)**



Thank you

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