



Newsletter 6, December 2009

• Welcome

- Welcome to the sixth newsletter for the New Zealand Association of Positive Psychology (NZAPP) – keeping members informed about new developments in positive psychology in New Zealand and around the world.

• “Name the Newsletter” Competition!

- We would like to re-brand our newsletter. We have received a few suggestions for names, and we would really like a few more to throw into the competition hat. Can you suggest a more appropriate name? The winning suggestion will receive a positive psychology book.

• Topic: Resilience and emotional regulation – by Ailke Botha

- Resilient individuals are able to bounce back from negative emotional experiences and cope better than expected in difficult circumstances. The most important ability associated with resilience is emotional regulation. Emotional regulation involves people’s conscious and unconscious attempts to influence the emotions they have, when they are experienced and how they are experienced and expressed (Gross, 1998). Some of the main approaches to effectively manage unwanted or uncomfortable emotions are 1) increasing positive emotions, 2) reducing uncomfortable emotions or, 3) accepting one’s emotions.

The first approach to managing uncomfortable emotions suggests that one cultivates positive emotions - not only in everyday life, but also in response to negative circumstances. Cultivating positive emotions may build one’s resilience to stressful events (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). Cohn et al. (2009) found that positive emotions were related to higher levels of resilience and life satisfaction. They suggest that it is ‘in-the-moment positive emotions’ such as joy and interest, and not more general positive evaluations of one’s life, that influence one’s resilience. Research indicates that individuals with mild or moderate depression benefit from deliberately inducing positive emotions (Seligman, Rashid & Parks, 2006). However, individuals with extremely strong negative emotions may need to reduce the intensity of their uncomfortable emotions before being able to benefit from positive emotions (Cohn et al., 2009).

The second approach to dealing with uncomfortable emotions focuses on intentionally reducing the intensity of emotions. Some of these approaches focus on suppressing emotions. Suppressing emotion involves the attempts to down-regulate the internal experience and external expression of unwanted (usually negative) affect (Dunn et al., 2009, p. 761). Dunn et al. (2009) investigated the consequences of different forms of emotional regulation. Their findings suggest, contrary to current clinical belief, that suppressing emotions (of both felt and expressed affect) can lead to “an ongoing down-regulation of emotion and unpleasant memories” (p. 761).

The third approach to uncomfortable emotions, also known as incorporating the ‘third wave’ of interventions, include mindfulness and acceptance techniques which encourage people to accept and observe their emotions in a non-judgmental way (Dunn et al., 2009). Dunn et al.’s findings indicate that acceptance of uncomfortable emotions may sometimes be counter-productive and actually lead to a subsequent increase in negative affect.

It is suggested that a fit-all approach to emotional regulation will probably not effectively consider individuals’ unique temperament, personality and life experience. See Botha (2009) for a discussion on different cognitive, emotional, creative, behavioural and problem solving strategies to regulate emotions and build resilience. Most people will probably find a combination of strategies useful, depending on the nature of the situation and the emotions they are experiencing.

○ References

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- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., Brown, S. L., Mikels, J. A. & Conway, A. M. (2009). Happiness unpacked: Positive emotions increase life satisfaction by building resilience. *Emotion*, 9(3), 361-368.

- Dunn, B. D., Billotti, D., Murphy, V. & Dalgleish, T. (2009). The consequences of effortful emotion regulation when processing distressing material: A comparison of suppression and acceptance. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 47, 761-773.
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- Seligman, M. E. P., Rashid, T. & Parks, A. C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 61, 774-788.
- Tugade, M. M. & Fredrickson, B. L. (2007). Regulation of positive emotions: Emotion regulation strategies that promote resilience. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 8, 311-333.

• Reviews

- **Book:** *The Village That Could* by Ralph Brown of Media Associates (www.media-associates.co.nz) is an easy-to-read and entertaining fable for adults about *resilience*. It tells a story of a famine- and wolf-threatened village facing great adversity, and how by engaging in 15 ways to increase resilience, villagers were able to find hope and take courage from the jaws of hopelessness and helplessness. I was particularly struck by the statement “Think of setbacks as setbacks, not failures”, which left the door of hope open to discovering further options and finding ways forward. The 15 key resilience ideas are described separately at the end of the book, with suggestions for personal action. *Review by Alison Ogier-Price*
- **Article:** Sheldon, K., & Hoon, T. (2007): The multiple determination of well-being: Independent effects of positive traits, needs, goals, selves, social supports, and cultural contexts. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 8(4), 565-592. *Review by Denise Quinlan*

There are many and varied factors which influence our well-being, including personality and where we live, and it's difficult to establish which things matter most. Sheldon has previously identified six levels of organisation that contribute to optimal human functioning or well-being (Sheldon, 2004, 'Optimal Human Being: An Integrated Multi-level Perspective'). These are: psychological needs (i.e. autonomy, relatedness and competence); personality traits (by which he means a 'positive Big Five trait profile', which could also be construed to include character strengths, being that they are defined as malleable personality traits); goals or intentional life (achieving personal goals especially ones that are intrinsically valued); self-concepts (including self-esteem, self-efficacy, and proximity to a 'desired self'-state); social relations; cultural influences.

This model suggests that happy people are those who have their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness met, are low on neuroticism and high on agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and openness, achieve their personal goals, have high self-esteem, feel they have good social support, and live in a society which as a whole, enjoys high levels of well-being.

Research has indicated that each of these levels contributes uniquely to well-being and that their effects were irreducible (Sheldon & Hoon, 2007). However, while each level has its own unique effects, it may also be influenced by changes at other levels which affect well-being and so begin spirals of change.

The authors argue that for maximal effect, interventions should target many levels of the person. While this is not feasible for most programmes, the authors point out that targeting even one or two levels may create 'cascading positive effects' at other levels.

- Sheldon, K., & Hoon, T. (2007). The multiple determination of well-being: Independent effects of positive traits, needs, goals, selves, social supports, and cultural contexts. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 8(4), 565-592.

• News

- A coaching psychology special interest group (CPSIG) was recognised by the New Zealand Psychological Society earlier this year, and has now been formally established as of November 2009. This group held its inaugural event in Auckland with international coaching psychology expert, Professor Stephen Palmer, as keynote speaker. Chair, Sam Farmer, commented: "we're looking forward not only to building a professional identity and pathway for psychologists who coach in New Zealand, but also continuing our dialogue with other professionals involved in coaching. Fundamentally, we believe in the importance of a psychologically informed, ethical and evidence-based approach to coaching." For further information or to join the CPSIG Google Group, email: sam@enhanceltd.co.nz
- National Project Fund: A Strengths Based Approach to Education

Ako Aotearoa (National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence) has recognised the growing interest in the applications of positive psychology to education, and has announced the newly funded project "Trialing and Evaluating a Strengths Based Learner Engagement Programme". The

project is concerned with the fact that there is a substantial number of youth that are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). Reconnecting this population with education is of critical importance to New Zealand society, and how to achieve this, is a significant challenge. Lindsay Davis-Goff (Trade and Commerce) and his team are adopting a new Strengths Based approach, which has developed out of the application of positive psychology and workplace engagement to education, to re-engage these learners.

- **Stay Informed**

- There are some very good positive psychology resources available via online access, including:
 - The Positive Psychology listserv: to join, email to FRIENDS-OF-PP-request@lists.apa.org with 'Subscribe' as the subject.
 - Positive Psych Daily News: to subscribe, go to <http://positivepsychologynews.com/feed>

- **Events**

- 2010 February 12-13 The 2nd Australian Positive Psychology and Well-Being Conference, Melbourne.
- 2010 May 5-6 The 5th Happiness and Its Causes Conference. Sydney, Australia.
- 2010 June 23-26 The 5th European Conference on Positive Psychology, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- 2011 (aprox July) The 2nd World Congress on Positive Psychology (IPPA), London, UK.

- **NZAPP News**

- Membership Total: 332 (up from 276 in September).
- Lucky Member: With each previous newsletter, we have given away a book to a randomly-drawn member. (These have included: 'The Happiness Training Plan', 'An Introduction to Positive Psychology', 'Positivity' (Barbara Fredriksen), and 'Random Acts of Kindness: 365 Ways to Make the World a Nicer Place' (Danny Wallace). The winner of a book prize in this issue is Chris Scott who wins a copy of *The Village that Could* kindly donated (and written) by Ralph Brown (and reviewed above).

- **Support**

- You can support your association by informing your networks, friends, and colleagues about the NZAPP. Contributions to these newsletters are welcomed, and may include information of interest, book and article reviews, thoughts on areas of positive psychology, general comments or questions, and progress on current research.

- **Quote**

- "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved" - Helen Keller (1880 - 1968).