



The Positive Press

Newsletter No.9, September 2010

• Greetings

- Here we are more than half way through 2010, and with our ninth issue of the *Positive Press*. Our ongoing mission is to keep members informed about new developments in positive psychology in New Zealand and around the world.

• Membership Survey

- We are now surveying members of the NZAPP. This quick 10 question survey can be located at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZFRFMYYV>

• Topic of Interest

- The Growth Mindset - Reuben Rusk's point-of-view
- Recent research has shown the power of what Carol Dweck calls our 'mindset'. According to her research, we can view things with either a 'fixed' mindset or a 'growth' mindset. With the fixed mindset, we view things as unchanging and permanent, so we tend to be passive, avoid challenges and see effort as fruitless. We react to our circumstances, often reinforcing existing habits and confirming our fixed mindset. When we fail, it makes us more likely to ignore useful lessons, resign ourselves to how things are, and see very little change. In contrast, with the growth mindset we recognise that abilities and success can be cultivated and grown over time. This view leads us to respond proactively and creatively to situations, embrace challenges and see effort as a part of making progress. We accept setbacks as an inevitable part of the journey, so we are more likely to learn from them, persevere and eventually succeed. The message of Dweck's research is simple: cultivate the growth mindset. By focussing on achievements or current abilities, we can inadvertently reinforce the fixed mindset. It is better to reinforce the growth mindset by focussing on attitude, effort and perseverance. By cultivating this mindset, we become more motivated and willing to learn, which both ultimately affect our progress in the long term. The journey is long and the steps are small, but the growth mindset motivates us to keep on stepping. If we persevere for a long time, then step by step, we can eventually climb mountains.
- For further reading, visit Dweck's website: <http://mindsetonline.com> or obtain her book "Mindsets"

• Book Review: **The politics of happiness: What government can learn from the new research on wellbeing, by Derek Bok (Princeton University Press, 2010)**

- Review by Dan Weijers (néé Turton), Philosophy Department, Victoria University

The *Politics of Happiness* is a very important book. Its main premise is that surveys and other methods of measuring people's wellbeing are providing increasingly meaningful results. Based on this premise, Bok argues that governments should use the results of wellbeing research in addition to existing economic measures to guide policy-making. Furthermore, Bok provides many insightful examples of how existing policies in the USA could be changed to increase its citizens' wellbeing.

The most striking claim in the book is that: "the results of happiness studies seem, if anything, more reliable than many familiar statistics and other types of evidence that legislators... routinely use in making policy" [p40]. Unfortunately, the weight of this claim is not matched by the evidence Bok provides for it. Bok's defense of the trustworthiness of wellbeing research rests heavily on reported correlations between several measures of happiness. These measures include: self-assessments of life satisfaction, frequency of smiling, brain scans, and others. Bok should have discussed the size of the correlations of these measures. A highly significant but small correlation between two measures provides evidence that they are very likely to be related in some small way, but also that they are not the same thing. Bok doesn't provide all of the primary references for this data. If he did, however, readers would be able to see that most of the correlations between the various measures of happiness are just this – significant, but small. For this reason, wellbeing

research will be unreliable for guiding policy until it is decided exactly what wellbeing is and which of the so-called measures of wellbeing are actually providing information we really want to know. Bok is correct that reliability problems also exist with traditional economic measures of wellbeing, but at least it is clear what these measures are evaluating.

This book will cause considerable controversy because it provides an appealing challenge to the deeply ingrained economic and political orthodoxy about how to measure progress. Policy-makers and anyone interested in politics or wellbeing should read this polemical book. Indeed, foregoing this book will surely result in being on the back foot in future discussions about what progressive governments should be doing for their citizens.

- **Conference Review: 5th European Congress on Positive Psychology (ECP)**
(Copenhagen, 2010 June 23-26) - reviewed by Bee Teng Lim and Erica Chadwick

On June 23-26, Erica Chadwick and Bee Lim from Associate Professor Paul Jose's Savoring Lab escaped the Wellington winter chill to attend the 5th European Congress on Positive Psychology in Copenhagen, Denmark. More than 600 researchers, clinicians, educators, students, business owners, coaches, consultants and medical experts attended ECP 2010. In addition to the engaging keynote presentations, there were many interesting symposiums and workshops on topics such as optimal functioning, character strengths, post-traumatic growth, positive assessment and psychotherapy, positive media, etc. We were a bit too spoilt for choice, don't you think?

Erica enjoyed listening to researchers like Corey Keyes and Barbara Fredrickson who have directly informed her research. She also enjoyed discovering for herself an academic (Joar Vitterso) who was critical of colleagues making cross-cultural comparisons too soon. And she was most impressed with a debate about the utility and merit (or lack thereof) of measuring eudaimonia (human flourishing). In addition, she had an engaging time discussing her research on 'Savoring: A path to greater wellbeing in adolescence.' She was able to disseminate her findings from the first study observing adolescents' use of savoring strategies overtime, for example, older adolescents use savoring more than their younger counterparts, which positively predicts feelings of positive emotions and subsequently leads to eudaimonia. It was fantastic to hear so much enthusiasm from all over the world for research and ideas in positive psychology and to play with those ideas through conversation.

Prof. Barbara Fredrickson, the pioneer of the Broaden-and-Build theory, highlighted the potential of savouring in increasing happiness and wellbeing during her book launch at the Black Diamond (The Royal Library in Copenhagen). Her talk conveniently laid the foundation for Bee Lim's presentation on "How engaged and dismissive savoring differentially interact with explanatory style to predict mood outcomes". The presentation was very well received, and she's working on replying to emails and corresponding with researchers who were interested in the measure and findings. Kerstin Bannert, Dr. Jose's short-term intern from Germany, and Bee also presented a poster on the well-being indicators of NZ adolescents, and benefitted greatly from engaging in discussions with researchers and practitioners in the area of positive youth development. More excitingly, international research collaborations were formed over coffee and the savouring lab will be involved in a cross-nation study on happiness and meaning making.

The experience of learning at ECP, the beauty of Copenhagen, the joy of catching up with old friends, the hope to attend the 6th ECP in Moscow... There are plenty for us to SAVOUR!!!

- **NZ Research**

- **Project: Assessing flourishing in schools**

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand is currently conducting a pilot project investigating how schools are faring in terms of mental health promotion. The Foundation has developed an assessment tool to assess flourishing in schools. FEAT (Flourishing Environments Assessment Tool) is informed by the New Economics Foundation's 'Five Ways to Wellbeing', and the assessment will hopefully lead to recommendations on follow up interventions to increase wellbeing in schools and protect against mental health problems. For more information, contact Grant Rix: grant.rix@mentalhealth.org.nz

- **Researcher profile: Bee Teng Lim (Post-Doc), Victoria University**

Bee's recent research centres on positive psychology, health professional's consultation competence, and addiction medicine. Specific interests include questions of 1) cross-cultural perceptions of happiness, meaning and well-being, 2) relationships between psychological

constructs (such as explanatory style, human values and time perspective) with savoring, and 3) evidence-based positive interventions and how they can lead to optimal human and family development (i.e. one that connotes flourishing and resilience), despite adversity.

- *We would like to stay informed (and inform the membership) of current Positive Psychology researchers and projects in NZ. Please send a brief description of any project you are involved in, with project contact details and location, current status and permission to put in newsletter and/or on the NZAPP website, to editor@positivepsychology.org.nz.*

• Stay Informed

- **New Affiliate:** Global Chinese Positive Psychology Association <http://globalcppa.org/>
- **Books:** Resilience: How to Navigate Life's Curves. By Senia Maymin and Kathryn Britton.
- **Courses:** A list of Positive Psychology courses around the world: <http://adjix.com/6sim>.
- **Journals:**
 - [The Journal of Positive Psychology](#)
 - [Journal of Happiness Studies](#)
 - [Journal of Applied Psychology: Health and Well-being](#)

• Events

- 2010 Dec 14-15 [1st International Congress of Coaching Psychology, London, U.K](#)
- 2011 June 16-17 [6th Annual Happiness & Its Causes Conference, Brisbane](#)

NZAPP is an Endorsing Body for the 6th Annual Happiness & Its Causes Conference in 2011. Speakers for the conference include: His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the eminent psychologist Dr Paul Ekman and renowned Buddhist monk and meditator, Matthieu Ricard.

For our members, we have a special offer of a 10% discount for early bird and full 2-day conference prices, as well as on pre- and post-workshop prices.
- 2011 July 23-26 [2nd World Congress on Positive Psychology \(IPPA\). Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.](#)
- 2012 6th European Congress on Positive Psychology (ECP), Moscow, Russian Federation

• NZAPP Membership News

- **Membership Total:** 490 (up from 434 in June). If you are wondering if 490 is a lot, the New Zealand Psychological Society, New Zealand's largest psychological society, currently has just over 1,000 members!
- **Book Prize to a Lucky Member:** Positive psychology coaching: Putting the science of happiness to work for your clients, by Robert Biswas-Diener and Ben Dean.
 - Alex Linley, in a review published in the *International Coaching Psychology Review* (2007), described this text as "replete with gems and insights that any coaching psychologist could use on any day of the week in any coaching psychology assignment" and that "Positive Psychology Coaching is simply the best resource for coaching psychologists who want to introduce more of the positive into their practice".
 - The randomly-drawn member who wins this newsletter's book prize is: Karen Nimmo
- A Certificate of Membership to the NZAPP is available on request, by emailing info@nzapp.co.nz.

• Support

- Suggestions as to what you would like included in the newsletter are welcomed.
- Would you consider providing a book or article review for the next newsletter?
- Other contributions may include information of interest, thoughts on an area of positive psychology, general comments or questions, and progress on current research.
- You can further support your association by informing networks, friends, and colleagues about the NZAPP.

• Quote

"We deem those happy who, from the experience of life, have learned to bear its ills, without being overcome by them." - Juvenal (Roman poet, approx. 1st-2nd century AD)