On 8-9 May, the 3rd “Happiness and Its Causes” Conference was held in Sydney, Australia, with over 2,000 participants.

I’m a fan of the Happiness and Its Causes conference, and have attended every year since the inaugural conference in 2006. Each year it gets better and better. Next year’s conference is already scheduled for May 14-15, 2009.

We heard from over 50 international and local speakers from diverse and distinguished areas: academic, professors, monk, psychologist, psychiatrist, researcher, health expert, medical reporter, scientist, CEO, financial analyst, neurosurgeon, child psychologist, school principal, newspaper editor, relationship expert, choir director, artist, philosopher, economist. Here are some of the topics covered:

Learning to be mindful: monks, scientists, academics, professors and university lecturers all reinforced the importance of being still, mindful and paying attention. Many did it by role modeling and having a calming effect on the whole audience. They reminded us to build moments into each day to rest, recover, and regenerate. Our way of being gives us the resources to deal with life’s ups and downs. Mindfulness and attention are the key to mental balance.
The future of Australia’s children: Steve Biddulph entertained us all, revealed his inner child, and reminded us of the importance of nurturing our young. Tal Ben-Shahar’s story of the incredible woman who inspired him, Marva Collins, reminded us of relentless optimism and tenacity in bringing the best out in children. (Tal Ben-Shahar is shown here explaining something to Richard Davidson.) Martin Seligman and Stephen Meek (principal of Geelong Grammar) stimulated us with ‘what could be’ in Australian education, and how Positive Psychology can change our children. Michael Carr-Gregg talked about ‘rampant spiritual anorexia’ in our children and schools, with respect to the consumerism, self-focused push of the current era. We were excited to hear that the Australian Federal Government is taking notice.

The Buddhist and the Scientist: a highlight was hearing from Matthieu Ricard (the world’s happiest man, shown here at dinner with Dan Gilbert) and then hearing from Richard Davidson, the neuroscientist who is famous for his research involving measuring Matthieu’s brain as he meditated in an fMRI machine. He found evidence that happy centres in the brain light up during meditation. Richard Davidson told us “I am committed to putting compassion on the scientific map”.

Participant reflection: “I am even more aware of the inextricable link between the mind, brain, my reactions to the events around me, and my health (not to mention, my sanity). The research and evidence on neurogenesis and neuroplasticity gives rise to a sense of urgency to applying my mindfulness practice on a daily basis. The cumulative effect of such practice has enormous benefits.”

Negative emotions: we have them, we work with them. It’s not about avoiding them. “Do not allow them to persist beyond when they’re useful” (Neuroscientist, Richard Davidson). Our mental training allows us to cultivate antidotes to negative emotions and helps us to recover more quickly from negativity. We learn to transcend our negative emotions, we do not allow them to define us. “It takes no more emotional energy to be kind than to be rude” (Dr Stephen Post). Don’t be the slave of your own mind; happy people are not slaves of their minds.

It’s for everyone: we all found that this conference helps us with ourselves, our families, children, friends, communities. It helps us to think about the grander policy issues, and how society could benefit. At work, we have new information to help build better workplaces. This conference gives us hope that we can institute some real changes for creating real, sustainable well-being for the country – now and into the future.

“"It's not what you do, it's the heart you bring into it" (Dr Stephen Post)

Here are some of the take-aways from my friends:

“"To me it comes down to some simple messages: work out what’s meaningful in your life and engage and be joyful about it; give generously to others – connect deeply; stop the noise and simply be here right now. Love your life and be grateful!"

"My take home message was the recipe for a happy life which is to include the following daily- meditation practice (mind training), positive thinking, two pieces of dark chocolate, red wine and …[removed in case you have a strict firewall]!"

"There was extensive science and research that helped demonstrate the tangible differences that some really simple tasks can create."

"Being mindful of each other is the way to enhance and nurture social connections, and to bring the best out in each other."

Darling Harbor, Sydney, Australia

References


Conference images are from a site with many more images of the conference participants and surroundings.

Not seeing the pictures for the book links? Disable Adblocking for this site to view them.
Amanda, thank you for this excellent guest article.

It’s so nice to be able to feel like we were there – like we’re hearing the Stephen Post quotes, like Mattieu Richard and Richard Davidson are speaking in front of us.

Kathryn, thank you so much for the editing on this article – in terms of links, photos, everything – what an incredibly alive piece about the conference.

This makes me want to go next year!

My best,

Senia

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WAYNE JENCKE

May 31, 2008 - 8:16 pm

Amanda,

Do you think that positive psych emphasises doing as opposed to being?

Also I’m interested in your experience of positive psychology in Australia. I have found that corporates are cynical as it is perceived to align closely with pop psychology – what has your experience been.

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DAVID

June 2, 2008 - 11:59 am

there is a really interesting conversation between Davidson and Daniel Goleman (author of Emotional Intelligence) regarding Davidson’s meditation research. I think you can hear samples of it at [http://www.morethansound.net](http://www.morethansound.net)

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AMANDA HORNE

June 3, 2008 - 4:34 am

Hi Wayne

I think that Positive Psychology promotes both being and doing. It promotes a way of seeing the world, therefore how we ‘be’ in the world, and from that position it affects what we do and how we interact. The ‘doing’ is also emphasised in the practical aspects of Pos Psych, activities we can undertake to improve our wellbeing.

In Australia my experience with corporates and executives has been great – this area resonates with them. They are eager to bring Positive Psychology to their teams and organisations. The scientific research definitely helps to deal with the cynicism.

Amanda

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AMANDA HORNE

June 3, 2008 - 4:45 am

David – thank you for this website! Great resources.

Amanda
Amanda, I’m currently writing a positive psychology and wellness course for RMIT University. I have just finished the research stage and one thing that I have concluded is that positive psychology doesn’t place enough emphasis on mindfulness. I found some interesting works that suggests concepts like flow are a form of meditation.

Secondly its interesting that we have had different experiences of positive psychology. I find in Australia that people tend to read “authentic happiness” and become experts on positive psychology. I have also seen people doing all sorts of things under the guise of positive psychology without any rigorous research supporting what they do (e.g. appreciative inquiry – I haven’t been able to find any peer reviewed studies on AI – just case studies which could be all Hawthorne effect). Research supposedly is what distinguishes positive psychology from pop psychology.

Hey Wayne,

What does RMIT stand for? Will your notes for the course — e.g., your research section — be published in any form that the rest of us could see it?

Did you ever contact David Cooperrider about the AI research question, as we discussed earlier? Did you happen to look at the chapter by David Cooperrider and Leslie Sekerka in Positive Organizational Scholarship — the chapter called Toward a Theory of Positive Organizational Change? I wonder if it might have some pointers to research.

Kathryn

Hi Wayne

I do agree with you on the emphasis – when I was learning about PP a few years ago, I wondered why the course I was doing didn’t cover mindfulness and meditation. That’s changing now.

Mindfulness was mentioned frequently in the Australian Positive Psychology conference this year in April. And the Happiness Conference. Some lecturers already integrating it into their curriculum (e.g. Tal Ben-Shahar at Harvard). I include it in my corporate workshops and coaching. If Pos Psych is concerned with the scientific study of wellbeing, then mindfulness definitely has a place here. In The How Of Happiness, Sonja Lyubomirsky discusses mindfulness (a little).

Good luck with your course – it sounds great.

Amanda
Wayne,
William James, who could be considered a direct ancestor of today's positive psychology, wrote, “The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about.”

It is quite common for researchers to say that their particular focus areas have received little emphasis. Kashdan says it about curiosity. Haidt says it about elevation. I believe that Snyder said it about hope. And so on.

Positive psychology is a young field — and at that, an amalgam of the work of many different people following their own particular interests and goals. Perhaps you can pose interesting research questions that will stimulate researchers to explore the importance of mindfulness to positive psychology more fully.

I believe that Barbara Fredrickson has been doing some work with mindfulness in her Positive Emotion and Psychophysiology Lab, but I’m having trouble tracking down a resource that I could share. You might try getting in touch with her directly.

Kathryn
To tell the truth, we lie almost constantly and every day: from small tricks and hushing up small flaws...

Admin K.H.B.: John, Given that this article was posted in 2009 and the work by Brown, Sokol, and Friedman to...

Ruth Hayes: Nice article. Related to this – a framework for ethical speech that was shared with me and that I...

John: You support a completely discredited hypothesis (Losada Line)?

Thank you Elaine. your review very great

Rebecca: This article really resonates with my personal journey of understanding my own cycles. Thank you for further...

David: As a man, I can say you nailed everything there is to know about men in relationships. In 2 lines! Secret #1:...

robinhoodi: Yeah! Very true, actually I heard about Carin Rockind even in the past that she has taught thousands of...

Lisa Buksbaum: You are both talented and wise.... think of all the lives you’ve enhanced. Twice graced with...

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Random Posts

Happiness and Its Causes 2019. Date: June 24-25, 2019 Location: International Convention Center, Sydney, Australia Price: Starts from AUD $895 plus GST for a 2-day Early Bird ticket. Pre- and post-conference tickets are also available. Description: Professor David Cooperrider from Case Western University is delivering a keynote speech at this event, on "Embracing Change In Your Life". Participants can also expect to learn from Michael Mosely, Professor Elissa Epel, Professor Amit Bernstein, and Dr. Fred Luskin. Topics include life satisfaction, happiness, and the conference is for people, prac.

Long term trends in happiness and income are not related; short term fluctuations in happiness and income are positively associated. Evidence for this is found in time series data for developed countries, transition countries, and less developed countries, whether analyzed separately or pooled. Skeptics, who claim that the long term time series trend relationship is positive, are mistaking the short term association for the long term one, or are misguided by a statistical artifact. Some analysts assert that in less developed countries happiness and economic growth are positively related "up His Holiness the Dalai Lama responding to questions from Australian radio presenter Richard Fidler at the start of the Happiness & Its Causes conference in Sydney, Australia on June 10, 2015. Photo/Rusty Stewart. His Holiness the Dalai Lama with fellow panelists on stage during the Happiness & Its Causes conference in Sydney, Australia on June 10, 2015. Photo/Rusty Stewart. His Holiness the Dalai Lama waving to the audience at the end of the opening session of the conference on Happiness & Its Causes conference at Luna Park in Sydney, Australia on June 10, 2015. Photo/Jeremy Russel