

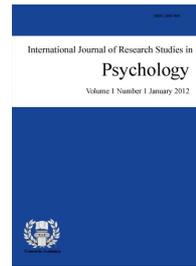
Introduction to the Special Issue on Positive Psychology

Datu, Jesus Alfonso 

Guest Editor

De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines (jess.datu@yahoo.com)

DOI: 10.5861/ijrsp.2012.295



ISSN: 2243-7681
Online ISSN: 2243-769X

OPEN ACCESS

Psychologists recognized the practical utility of highlighting positive traits, positive emotions and enabling institutions with the emergence of Positive Psychology (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). As opposed to the symptom-reduction thrust of the psychopathology model, the current paradigm endorses the promotion of holistic well-being to optimize psychological wellness. That said, this Introduction to the Special Issue on Positive Psychology discusses seven articles to further examine and advance conceptual, empirical and theoretical understanding in the study of positive psychological outcomes.

Positive Psychology is defined as “an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions” (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005, p. 410). It also involves optimal human functioning that aims to unravel and promote the factors that permeate individual and communal satisfaction and happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It endeavors to capture psychological constructs that foster movement towards psychological wellness more than alleviating negative psychological symptoms. With these conceptions in mind, the main objective of this Special Issue on Positive Psychology is to offer recent empirical and theoretical findings to the research consumers of *International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology*.

The study of positive traits is one of the pillars in the framework of Positive Psychology (Kim, Keck, Miller & Gonzalez, 2012; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). To better understand dispositional factors that enhance well-being, Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed a structure of character strength that consists of 24-lower level strengths and six general facets of virtues. Conceptualizing psychological health (e.g. subjective well-being, and psychological well-being) and positive behavioral outcomes (e.g. prosocial behaviors and academic achievement) therefore, may be realized by looking at positive traits that individuals possess (e.g. fairness, forgiveness, love, perspective, spirituality, and etcetera).

In the first article of Mashuri, Zaduqisti, and Supriyono, a significant empirical finding was presented that posits on the impact of perspective-taking on outgroup helping when warmth impression and outgroup status were taken as moderating variables. They found out that people who are not part of a specific group are more likely prone to get help when their perspective-taking is high. The authors zeroed in on the fact that prosocial motives (in the form of perspective-taking) more than strategic motives (in the form of social categorization or outgroup status) may facilitate an elevated inclination to assist others towards meeting specific objectives regardless of their social strata.

Recognizing the empirical value of the said article, it is imminent that genuinely helping others who do not belong to the group where we are affiliated with can most likely occur if the intrinsic desire to help them is dominant as opposed to a motive to portray a higher social status as helper in the dyadic relationship. In other

words, altruistic motives more than egoistic tendencies operate as a crucial element in the process of executing outgroup helping. This dynamics may be not so difficult to realize in collectivistic societies like the Indonesian context where socially-construed motives are more endorsed than individualistic societies which place significant weight on self-esteem and autonomy. It poses important implications on the formulation of psychological interventions as it permeates accessibility of people from minority/ethnic groups in diversity training which prioritize organizational harmony. It may present practical use in the delivery of conflict management strategies as well.

In the second article, Datu and Valdez investigated how Filipino adolescents conceptualize happiness given that meaning and concepts regarding a specific phenomenon is sensitive to one's cultural orientation (Bruner, 1990). The participants' understanding of happiness revolved around the following themes: *satisfaction of wants*, *absence of worries*, *expression of positive emotions*, *motivational drive*, and *fulfillment of relational needs*. Distinct personal characteristics and behavioral strategies were charted as well. Yet, being helpful is the most robust indicator of a happy person which signifies that prosocial motives operate in the way individuals from this developmental phase perceive a happy person. Behavioral strategies are predominantly interpersonal in nature, a locus that is more likely to happen as socially-engaging behaviors are rewarded in a collectivistic society though some intrapersonal intentional activities were enumerated as well.

From such conceptions, the conceptual and theoretical applicability of the Subjective Well-Being Model of Diener (1984) may be further optimized as the way Filipino adolescents interpret happiness is consistent with SWB's assertion of psychological wellness as the presence of positive affect and life satisfaction, along with the absence of negative affect. The prominence of *relational components* suggests that defining happiness in the context of these individuals has to be sensitive with the way they engage in socially-meaningful relationships. Psychological and counseling interventions that aim to enhance positive emotions of these individuals, hence, are recommended to resemble their distinct way of looking at happiness.

Framed to advance conceptual and theoretical understanding of happiness, the third article of Mateo and Datu explained Filipino adolescents' positive and joyous state on the lens of choice theory. The authors discovered that although the needs for *love and belongingness* and *fun and enjoyment* were significant correlates of happiness, the need for *love and belongingness* is the lone predictor of well-being. That said, the propensity to interact with others and to seek for affection from other people can impact adolescents' level of happiness which was consistent with the assertions from past studies.

Findings of the said article charted implications on the practice of choice theory in therapeutic encounters. Happiness-increasing strategies may be driven by a desire to satisfy the basic need for *love and belongingness*. As opposed to the inclination to *autonomy* or *independence* by individuals from individualistic societies, Filipino adolescents manifest greater thriving towards socially-engaging behaviors. Social and relational elements may be captured on the way they construe *quality world*. Psychologists and counselors, therefore, are suggested to formulate interventions that enhance social skills of individuals from this developmental phase to optimize their proneness to happiness.

In the fourth article, De la Peña conceptualized spirituality in the context of Positive Psychology. The author emphasized on the cultural specificity of spirituality as a substrate of well-being. For instance, variations of cultural practices among different locale and the pluralistic nature of distinct countries call for the need to utilize a process-based rather than the usual outcome-based approach in unraveling spirituality as a positive psychological construct. She stressed on the necessity to craft future empirical reports that examine psychological processes in spirituality across different cultures. Consequently, a context-specific and culturally appropriate model of spirituality can be formulated which strengthens its validity and applicability.

Arguments raised in the aforementioned article delineate critical directions not just in extending theoretical formulations of spirituality but also in the practice of psychological assessment and counseling. For example, a generalized and cross-culturally valid spirituality model should not be prioritized at this point since there is a

dearth of context-specific frameworks that explain psychological processes in spirituality. As such, psychologists are recommended to examine context-specific cognitions and behaviors that best represent spirituality among individuals. What makes it a significant contribution to therapeutic practice, on the other hand, is the fact that it mobilizes the need to observe multicultural competencies in appreciating unique spiritual practices and it allows better recognition of the role of spirituality in attaining desirable client outcomes.

Construed on the salient role of social motives in the achievement of a satisfying state, the fifth article of Ouano and Pinugu looked at the predictive worth of social goals on the life satisfaction of Filipino adolescents. In their investigation, it was divulged that social goals contributed to the variance in the respondents' life satisfaction. Distinct patterns of satisfaction with family, friends, living environment, self and school were figured out as well in relation to social affiliation, social responsibility, social concern and social approval goals.

With the scarce literature in the Philippine context that examined the influence of social goals to specific psychological outcomes, findings of the paper served as necessary precursors towards understanding the effects of social motives in student life satisfaction. This is a significant advancement as it suggests specific directions on how to enhance well-being of adolescents especially that they are vulnerable to experience negative emotions. Formulation of positive psychological and counseling interventions is recommended to be contextually situated with the social goals of adolescents to lead them towards a happy and meaningful life.

The sixth article of Garcia and Sison dealt with the conceptual and theoretical linkage between hope and subjective well-being. They provided a conceptual viewpoint on how a hopeful life orientation can lead individuals to joyous affective outcomes like happiness. Most importantly, they looked at the conceptual and practical utility of Bernardo's locus of hope model (2010) which zeroed in on the influence of social and contextual units in understanding hope as a psychological construct, a theoretical lens that better represents unique experiences of people from collectivistic societies. It also charted specific directions on future research topics that can be executed regarding the link between hope and happiness along with the mechanisms that bind them together.

Moving towards the advancement of self-determination theory as situated in social networking behaviors, Abellera, Ouano, Conway, Camilotes, and Doctor explored the mediating influence of relatedness in the relationship between Facebook use and self-esteem. The authors discovered that the feeling of connectedness with the usage of Facebook enhances likeliness of increasing self-worth. Individuals, therefore, gain self-esteem as the need to establish meaningful relationships is fulfilled through engaging in online social networking behaviors.

In collectivistic societies where socially-engaging behaviors are highly valued, findings of their paper may be not so difficult to realize as satisfaction of relational needs served as one of the mechanisms that foster the promotion of positive psychological outcomes. Increased accessibility of individuals to online social networking sites also explains why specific constructs like self-esteem profits from using Facebook. Nonetheless, the study advances enhancement of self-esteem which may result to a happy and satisfying life more than depressive effects of lower appraisal of self-worth.

Articles in the current issue endorsed nurturing of empirical evidences of positive psychological outcomes through conceptual, theoretical and empirical formulations. Though several studies were carried out to further strengthen theoretical and practical utility of Positive Psychology as a paradigm, gaps not addressed by these researches suggest a need to continuously examine dispositional, social, and contextual substrates along with the mechanisms that will lead individuals to life full of meaning, appreciation and happiness.

References:

- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.
Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 542–575.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.95.3.542>

Kim, J.H., Keck, P., Miller, D. & Gonzalez, R. (2012). Introduction to Positive Psychology: Overview and controversies. *Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling*, 2(1), 45-60.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook of classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.5.410>