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Editorial

The pursuit of happiness*

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The pursuit of happiness is becoming a central topic in a globalising society in which more and more people seek to fulfil the promises of political freedom and growing financial resources. When material opportunities are available to larger segments of the population, people are not only concerned with the question whether their basic needs are fulfilled, but also, and to an increasing degree, whether they are living a happy life. Indeed, the obsession with how to be happy is reflected by the growing piles of self-help books in bookstores all over the world and in the millions of copies of happiness books that are sold.

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s not only of growing concern in the broader population.
en increasingly productive in studying the main features of

factor irrelevant to psychological adaptation and personal development. On the contrary, a growing body of evidence shows that the ability to be happy and contented with life is a central criterion of positive mental health and social adaptation. Reviews on this topic (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005) suggest that happiness has many positive byproducts that have beneficial consequences for individuals, families, and communities. Happy individuals gain tangible benefits in a variety of life domains. They experience larger social rewards: more friends, stronger social support, and richer social interactions. There are indications that happiness is associated with superior work outcomes: increased productivity and creativity, more activity and flow, higher quality of work, and higher income. Contrary to the idea that happy people are just self-centered or selfish, the literature suggests that happy individuals tend to be relatively more cooperative, prosocial, and charitable. Moreover, subjective happiness may be integral to mental and physical health. Happy people are more likely to evidence greater self-control, have a bolstered immune system and even live a longer life.

Apart from the question of what are the benefits of happiness or subjective wellbeing (the terms are often used interchangeably), there is another challenging question to pose that is at the heart of the present special issue: How can happiness be increased and then sustained? Stimulated by this question, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al. (2005) proposed a partly optimistic model as a response to the prevailing pessimism engendered by the well-known factors of genetic determinism and hedonic adaptation (the observed tendency to quickly return to a relatively stable level of happiness or unhappiness despite major positive or negative events or life changes, a phenomenon also known as the “hedonic treadmill”). Is there some space for increasing one’s happiness beyond the stabilising nature of these determinants?

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al. (2005) presented their model under the banner “the happiness” (p. 114). They proposed that a person’s chronic

stable over time, and immune to influence or control (unless future scientists will learn how to alter people's basic dispositions and temperaments). *Circumstantial factors* refer to the individual's personal history, that is, life events that can affect one's happiness, such as a childhood trauma, an automobile accident, or winning a prestigious award. Circumstantial factors also include life status variables such as health, income, marital status, occupational status, job security, and religious affiliation. The third and arguably most promising means of altering one's happiness level is *activities and practices*. Intentional activities do not happen by themselves but require some degree of effort. One of the critical distinctions between the category of activity and the category of life circumstances is that circumstances happen to people, whereas activities are ways that people act on their circumstances. Some types of behavioural activities, such as exercising regularly or trying to be kind to others, are associated with increased wellbeing. Some types of cognitive activity, such as reframing situations in a more positive light, and particular kinds of volitional activity, such as striving for important personal goals, have the potential of increasing happiness levels.

Taking existing evidence into account, Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al. (2005) suggest that genetics account for approximately 50% of the happiness variation, circumstances for approximately 10% and intentional activity for the remaining 40%. They consider these percentages as supporting their proposal that intentional activities offer a possible route to more enduring increases in happiness beyond basic determinants. In other words, changing one's volitional efforts may have a happiness-boosting potential that is almost as large as the probable role of genetics, and apparently much larger than the influence of one's circumstances.

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effect of intentional activities brings us to the heart of this

itors of this journal, that has guidance and counselling as its

colleagues from very different parts of the world who are doing work that has direct relevance to the third category: intentional activities. We did so in the expectation that the combination of theory, method, and empirical work would be well-suited to offering new insights and practical guidelines for both scientists and practitioners interested in the development of long-term subjective wellbeing.

Most contributions to this issue, but not all of them, are inspired by Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) that conceptualises the self as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions in the society of mind. This theory is particularly suited to the study of intentional activities as it considers the variety of volitional practices in which a person is engaged as originating from relatively independent intentional *I*-positions. According to this theory, not only the content of the different *I*-positions (e.g. I as a sports fanatic, I as a helpful colleague, I as wanting to become a doctor) is relevant to mental health, but also the way they are *organised* as parts of a dynamic self, including the relative dominance of *I*-positions, neglected *I*-positions, and the role of significant others as internalised *I*-positions in the self. Moreover, this theory has generated a diversity of methods and practical procedures for the stimulation of learning processes in education (Meijers & Hermans, 2018) and for the reorganisation of the self in psychotherapy (Konopka, Hermans, & Goncalves, 2019).

Introduction to the contributions

Katrin den Elzen is interested in the question of how happiness and wellbeing can be achieved when someone faces extreme adversity such as severe disability and multiple

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graphical material from Nick Vujicic who was born without achl-Eberhart who lost her whole family in a car accident.

In his exploration of the renewal of the self as a multi-voiced process, Michiel de Ronde suggests to his clients that they read the New Testament story of the Prodigal Son, and identify themselves with the position of the three protagonists: the youngest son who asks for his heritage and leaves, the happy father who rewards his returning son with a great feast, and the oldest son who becomes discontented as he has devoted his best efforts to his duties during all those years. De Ronde demonstrates how the triple reading of the story of the father with the two sons helps him and his clients to transcend any black-and-white thinking and shows how the dialogue between the different positions is filled with shadows.

Jennifer Hausen starts her contribution by noticing that in contemporary culture it is natural to think that purchasing and owning the "right" possessions results in happiness. In contrast to this expectation, several lines of research demonstrate that high consumption lifestyles and materialistic values are not to be considered trustworthy paths to wellbeing. As a viable alternative to the pursuit of happiness, she proposes Minimalism as a way to find happiness in materially simpler lifestyles. She demonstrates how decision-making processes in the transition from a materialist to a minimalist lifestyle may profit from recognising the self as moving between multiple and relatively autonomous *I*-positions.

In their contribution, Olga Lehmann, Goran Kardum and Sven Klempe explain the human search for "eudaimonia" as involving the search for inner silence. In doing so, they suggest that the awareness of the dynamics of different *I*-positions can empower the person to feel more freedom over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The practice of inner silence can also promote the experience of genuine dialogues with others or with ourselves. The authors describe a number of implications for

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n self-exploration and self-transcendence, such as
, and prayer.

counter-emotions as responses to prevailing negative emotions, such as sadness, guilt, fear or anger. Dialogical relationships between emotions are facilitated in order to create space in the self for the emergence of positive emotions of happiness, hope, affection, intimacy and love. This method requires the therapist and the client to be fully present in the moment as a comprehensive embodied living person.

Nicole Torka presents the thesis that honesty towards ourselves and others is a pre-condition for genuine happiness. She argues that genuine happiness is impossible without authentic concern for the wellbeing of others. She considers honesty as a distinctive and universal virtue that not only contributes to the authentic fulfilment of self-motives and other-motives, but also to the common good. Such an incorporation of others into the self underscores a "democratic self" as adding value to the common good. She holds that the honesty of professionals who work in an educational or vocational setting is vital not only for the good of the self and the other but also for the common good.

As a starting point of their empirical research, Małgorzata Łysiak and Małgorzata Puchalska-Wasyl advocate the idea that the self has the ability to imaginatively move to a future point in time and then speak to oneself from there about the sense of what one is doing in one's present situation. On the basis of this proposition, they invite their respondents to become engaged in dialogues between their future and present *I*-positions and between their past and present *I*-positions. They then present data demonstrating that such dialogues have particular adaptive functions, such as providing supportive messages to oneself, redefining the past, and taking distance from current experiences.

Evelyn Plumb, Kathryn Hawley, Margaret Boyer, Michael Scheel and Collie Conoley's article is focused on empirical support for Goal Focused Positive Psychotherapy (GFPP),

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e-based, psychotherapy model that is inspired by positive
arch. The approach puts special emphasis on idiosyncratic

method focuses on procedures for enhancing client wellbeing.

Another contribution from positive psychology is Krysia Teodorczuk, Tharina Guse, and Graham du Plessis's study on the effect of interventions on hope and wellbeing among adolescents living in a child and youth care centre in South Africa. The experimental group partook in one-hour intervention sessions weekly, for a six-week period. No statistically significant differences in wellbeing and hope were found between the experimental and control group. The authors discuss moderating factors and offer reflections to better understand these outcomes.

Dave Redekopp and Michael Huston are interested in work as a significant factor in mental health and wellbeing outcomes. They argue that career development processes can be helpful in finding and managing work trajectories that lead to these outcomes. They review evidence for the interactive relationships between work, career development, mental health and mental illness. They also provide evidence for counselling and guidance intervention, organisational changes and policy directions and conclude with suggestions for improving wellbeing via career development procedures.

In the final part of this special issue, Anuradha Bakshi interviews Ed Diener, one of world's most renowned investigators of happiness and wellbeing who has devoted most of his professional career to unveiling much of the complexities of this phenomenon that is increasingly significant to the live trajectories of individuals in their search for direction and meaning in life. One of the surprising findings mentioned in this interview is that happiness and unhappiness are not to be understood as opposites but as relatively independent dimensions.

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ıtishchandra Kumar and Anuradha Bakshi review Martin
the Hope Circuit. The founder of Positive Psychology,

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

* This is the last article that emerged from the cooperation between Frans Meijers and me (HH). I remember him as an intimate friend, productive colleague, ardent professional, and dedicated scientist. This article and special issue as a whole are published as a tribute to Frans in memory of his precious gifts to the world.

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