

Jerome Carson and Michelle Yvette Tytherleigh

Welcome to the last issue of *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* of 2023. This is a bumper issue with 11 excellent papers. Five of the papers are part of a mini Special Issue on Positive Psychology, and these have been co-edited by Dr Michelle Tytherleigh and Jerome. We have six additional papers, including another in our ongoing series of Remarkable Lives, now curated by Robert Hurst. Next year, the journal will be moving to six issues per year, up from four issues. This reflects the large number of excellent submissions that we are receiving, now on a global basis. Let us consider the positive psychology papers first.

Our first paper is from Professor Carol Ryff, from Madison, Wisconsin, in the USA. Carol's work on psychological well-being has been partly influenced by sources as diverse as Marie Jahoda and Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia. By any criteria this is a seminal paper that all mental health professionals and their supporters should read. Carol states that historically she has been interested in "[...] articulating the personal strengths and capacities that define well-lived and fulfilling lives". Her research predates the start of the positive psychology movement. She describes increasing global inequalities and suggests we need to be more concerned with contextual factors. She also suggests a role for the arts and humanities in building health and well-being and notes, "[...] the emphasis on creativity evident in many recovery stories told in this journal".

The second paper comes from Professor Ryan Niemiec, who is the leading world authority on character strengths. Many people consider the focus on strengths to be one of the hallmarks of positive psychology. For readers new to this area, Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman developed an assessment tool, the VIA Inventory of Strengths. This measures 24 universal strengths that break down into six virtues, such as Wisdom and Humanity. Ryan presents the results from a survey of 12,000 individuals who completed this assessment. He also asked how they felt each of the character strengths related to mental health. Rather as Professor Ryff also suggested, creativity was found to be linked to mental health. A sample comment was, "I feel like I use creativity specifically in the arts to help when I need an outlet for myself mentally. It makes me feel complete and relieves stress and anxiety". Ryan suggests that each of the 24 strengths can make a positive contribution to mental well-being.

Suzette Cora Ragadu and Professor Sebastiaan Rothmann look at flourishing in work. Martin Seligman has declared that increasing flourishing is the core aim of positive psychology. The authors draw our attention to the fact that much of the research in positive psychology has been focused on the so-called WEIRD demographic (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic countries). They also note that most organisational psychology research has focused on people with POSH jobs (Professionals, Official jobs, Safe from discrimination, in High income countries). Their own research reports findings from some 436 childhood development workers from two South African provinces, who were neither WEIRD nor POSH. They looked at the concepts of having Decent Work and Capability and how these related to well-being at an emotional, social and psychological perspective.

The fourth paper is from Professor Michael Steger, Angelina Sung, Truc Anh Dao and Trudy Tompkins. Their paper looked at the construct of meaning during and following the COVID-19

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pandemic. Much of the research on meaning can be traced to the work of Viktor Frankl, who survived imprisonment in Auschwitz. They write, the concept of meaning “[...] asks us to make sense of and draw lessons from difficulty and tragedy [...]” but that “[...] it is still worthwhile pressing on towards a life worth living for all of us”. The authors offer a checklist of strategies that can help us all in these difficult times. These include reflection and meaning making, awareness of the flow of existence, orientation to time, life stories, purpose-infused living, being your authentic self, coping and self-care and healthy relationships.

The final positive psychology paper is from Professor Helena Marujo from Portugal. This paper reviews the connections between peace, mental health and positive psychology. Helena concludes that “peaceful environments and societies have the potential to positively impact mental health [...] while the absence of peace can contribute to mental health challenges”. She contends that creating “[...] a peaceful, just, supportive, democratic and inclusive society [...]” will promote growth, happiness and better mental health. She suggests we need to advocate for government policies that address the social determinants of health. Given the conflicts the world is facing at the end of 2023, her message is especially timely.

These five papers reflect changes taking place in positive psychology away from an individualistic focus towards a greater emphasis on social and contextual factors. The world has changed dramatically since Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi first articulated their vision for a new field of positive psychology in their seminal paper in 2000. The present authors show how contemporary positive psychology is responding to the new challenges we face in 2023.

The sixth paper in this issue is from Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky, Professor Mark Weeks and Jerome, on positive autoethnography (PosAE). This paper offers PosAE as a potential new methodology for positive psychology. PosAE sees something inspirational and motivational in narratives which are “authentic-positive”, “future-optimistic” and “hopeful”. The authors suggest, “Something may come to mind that can be framed positively, even in the darkest of times, and result in a positive narrative that could inspire others [...]” Perhaps one of the greatest examples of this is the story of Andrew Voyce. After years as a so-called “revolving door mental patient”, Andrew ended up in “a happy place”. Andrew is also a key contributor to the last paper in this issue and continues to send thoughtful pieces to *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*.

Lucy Hunn, Bonnie Teague and Paul Fisher present the results of a systematic review on the relationship between literacy and mental health outcomes. They identified 19 studies from nine different countries. The studies revealed that lower levels of literacy were associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Low literacy skills may limit social engagement as well as access to better paid jobs. They suggest that health-care professionals need to identify literacy difficulties within mental health services and offer help and support to those with literacy problems.

Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky makes a second appearance with her case study of Merv Neal. This is one of a series of case studies that Freda has conducted with laughter professionals. Merv is the chief executive of Laughter Yoga Australia. Can laughter actually benefit mental health? Merv has already conducted studies with people in chronic pain and patients on dialysis and has demonstrated that laughter has benefitted both groups. Working with people with mental health problems is his next priority.

The ninth paper in this issue is another in the series of Remarkable Lives. Robert Hurst interviews Danielle Jeffries. She comments that her diagnosis of borderline personality disorder does not define her, but she feels it has given her a tool to understand herself better. Her wisdom shines through in her account. She concludes, “To those who suffer any form of mental health difficulty, never give up. When the rainstorms come, ride them out. The sun will rise and so will you. I have never met a person with an easy past”. Inspirational!

The penultimate paper is from Madison Harding-White, Dara Mojtahedi and Jerome on a potentially new way of looking at post-traumatic growth (PTG), which they have called postadversarial appreciation. While the classic work on PTG by Tedeschi and Calhoun identified five distinct elements of PTG, the authors of the present paper wonder whether the phenomenon is not explained better by the single concept of post-traumatic appreciation. At present, this is a novel theoretical idea. The authors now need to find the empirical evidence to support this.

The final paper is on the life, music and mental health recovery of the amazing musician Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. This is a collaborative autoethnography from Patrick Hopkinson, Mats Niklasson, Peter Bryngelsson, Andrew Voyce and Jerome. Each author provides their own unique perspective on Brian. Previous papers by the authors focused on Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd and Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac. Brian Wilson is the only protagonist of the three who is still alive and still making music. The authors provide different insights into Brian's remarkable life. This has also been captured in the documentary film, *Long Promised Road*. Brian's is indeed an amazing account of creativity, resilience and survival against a lifelong battle with drugs and mental illness, and it is a unique perspective on the person behind those amazing Californian sounds.

Enjoy this latest issue.

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