Section 3: Applied Perspectives

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After the sections addressing criticisms and proposals for a more balanced field of positive psychology, we are pleased to introduce our readers to the third and final part of this book. In this part we have gathered some experiences of the critical application of positive psychology at different levels, from interventions in community settings to changes in public policy. Although not all of the authors of these chapters might call themselves "positive psychologists," the inclusion of these stories in our book is highly relevant, given that they address in different ways the wellbeing of groups in a wide variety of settings. In other words, in this section we have gathered those chapters that are principally about research and practical experiences applied to real-world challenges using critical positive psychological approaches. Of course, some chapters in earlier sections of the book also touched on questions of practical experiences or applications to some extent.

We have intended to give a relatively sequential structure to the section. Thus, we begin with three chapters on community psychology and bottom-up social transformation, followed by two chapters on research experiences in different contexts (mental health, international cooperation, and a crowdsourcing survey). We continue with two chapters on positive education, two on possible influences on public policy, and we close the section with a chapter on environmental psychology.

Ramón Soto and Salvatore Di Martino, community psychologists from Puerto Rico and Italy, inaugurate this section in Chapter 26 by illustrating the potential of Community Social Psychology for social transformation in Latin America, as a form of collective resistance to the negative consequences of globalization. Liberation practices in Latin America differ from those in Western countries in their indigenous worldview, their aim for social relevance, and their

explicit political engagement; as opposed to the decontextualized, individualistic practices more commonly found in a Western setting. According to the authors, an alliance between Community Social Psychology and Positive Psychology can provide a critical awareness that, as we have seen in previous sections, is one of the principal deficits of PP.

With a more applied focus, Eduardo Viera from Uruguay and Lauren Languido from the USA have worked together to bring us Chapter 27, with another perspective on liberation psychology. The stories on the struggles of people confined in Uruguayan prisons who also were recipients of psychosocial help in the aftermath of a fire, as well as other vulnerable groups such as the inhabitants of a slum situated in the outskirts of Montevideo, serve as examples of how PP can contribute to promoting dignified lives among excluded populations.

Speaking of commitment and involvement, is activism in itself a source of psychological wellbeing? Anne Montague and I analyse the implications of activism for human well-being in Chapter 28, using as examples young people involved in social change, as well as mental health activists who have turned their own suffering into a struggle for improved conditions and treatment of people with distress. According to our research, the little attention that has been given to these issues within positive psychology is probably due to the inconvenience for psychological science in general of dealing with issues far away from the supposed neutrality within which this science barricades itself.

In complete contrast to neutrality, interventions with a strong social commitment have a special place in this section. Taking as starting point sociological concepts, in Chapter 29 Jean-François Pelletier, Chyrell Bellamy, Maria O'Connell, Michaella Baker, and Michael Rowe from the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health present their experience using the multi-dimensional construct of *citizenship* as a tool for psychosocial intervention to enable community inclusion and the full participation in society of people with mental illnesses. According to the authors, citizenship can be defined as a strong connection to the

rights, *responsibilities*, *roles*, *resources*, and *relationships*—what they have termed the 5 Rs—that society offers to its members through public and social institutions and associational community life.

Optimism and revolutionary proposals contrast sometimes with the harshness of the situations with which community practitioners are faced in their daily work. In Chapter 30 Chris Beales, an English parish priest and social entrepreneur, analyses the brutality with which the realities of daily existence often impact the lives of people. Beales runs through the influences of his thinking and practice, which in turn are a vivid summary of the panoply of academic psychology from the study of suffering, violence, and cruelty to the study of meaning, wellbeing, and spirituality. The author illustrates his conceptual trip with a study in the context of development cooperation work in Kabul, Afghanistan in which the brutality of reality is explicitly depicted.

We also have a space for philosophical reflection (albeit with a marked applied accent) in this section. In Chapter 31, Manos Rhodes Hatzimalonas argues that the Greek meta-virtue of *philotimo*, as a positive cultural narrative, could make evident the need for PP to account for cultural and situational differences while attempting to define a gold standard in the study of virtues and well-being. The author presents preliminary findings from an international crowdsourcing study exploring definitions and narratives of *philotimo* offering a situational analysis of *philotimo*'s past, present, and possible future.

Positive education is an important subfield and we also have included two pieces on this relevant application of positive psychology. In Chapter 32, Dianne Vella-Brodrick, Nikki Rickard, and Tan-Chyuan Chin propose a framework for evaluating positive education and a case study in which they reflect the need for overcoming limitations and adopting gold practice standards in school-based well-being and positive education, so that successful and lasting impacts can be achieved. Going to a higher level, in Chapter 33 Charlie Simson, Lauren

Rosewarne, and Lea Waters propose to shape positive psychological research in order to influence public policy using as an example the case of positive educational research. The authors stress the importance of seeking to better communicate and integrate findings with those of related well-being education movements that are not explicitly affiliated to positive psychology, where these share common interests. Finally, they offer practical advice for designing and reporting research results that may be attractive and easy to use by policy makers.

In line with the applications to public policy presented by Simson and colleagues, we might ask if it is possible to apply positive psychology at a large-scale in a critical and self-reflective mode. To answer this question, in Chapter 34 Mike Zeidler, Liz Zeidler, and Byron Lee offer the surprising story of the Happy City project, "a uniquely practical, sustainable and accessible process enabling cities, towns or communities to directly increase happiness through participation, collaboration and celebration." The project implemented using a bottom-up approach a process of Participatory Development in Bristol, England.

Our next chapter moves the public policy question to a yet higher level. One of the stated aims of positive psychology is to improve well-being at the national scale, independent of economic progress (and even as an "antidote" to the unhappiness induced by chasing constant GDP growth). In Chapter 35, Mark White argues that attempts to bring this about by the direct method, often proposed by advocates of PP and their supporters in government, of measuring happiness and then adopting public policy to produce higher numbers for those measures are unlikely to succeed. Instead, he argues that addressing real social issues is likely to advance human happiness far more effectively, and with fewer ethical problems.

Various chapters in this section, and indeed throughout the entire book, have included discussions of the need for contextualization and cultural awareness. Chapter 36 by Pablo Olivos and Ricardo Ernst, two environmental psychologists from Chile, adds a new dimension to these discussions, introducing a debate on the role of the natural environment in the pursuit

of happiness. The authors show how this debate has been unjustifiably neglected by mainstream positive psychology and argue that knowledge should have an emancipatory role within the communities where research is carried out.

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