How, exactly, can positive psychology be better?

"Making positive psychology better" symposium, IPPA World Congress on Positive Psychology, Vancouver, Canada, 20-23 July 2023.

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Outline…

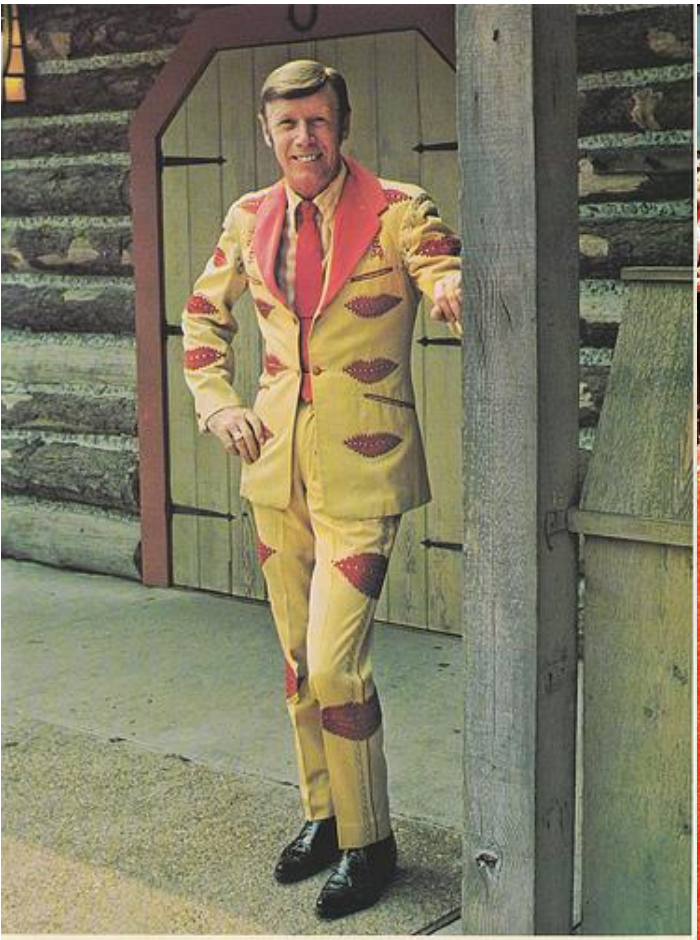
"*How, exactly, can positive psychology be better? With a clearer vision of what "better" might look like for a wider selection of stakeholders of the field of positive psychology, what are some actions that various stakeholders (academics, practitioners, leadership) could take to enable such a positive change?*"

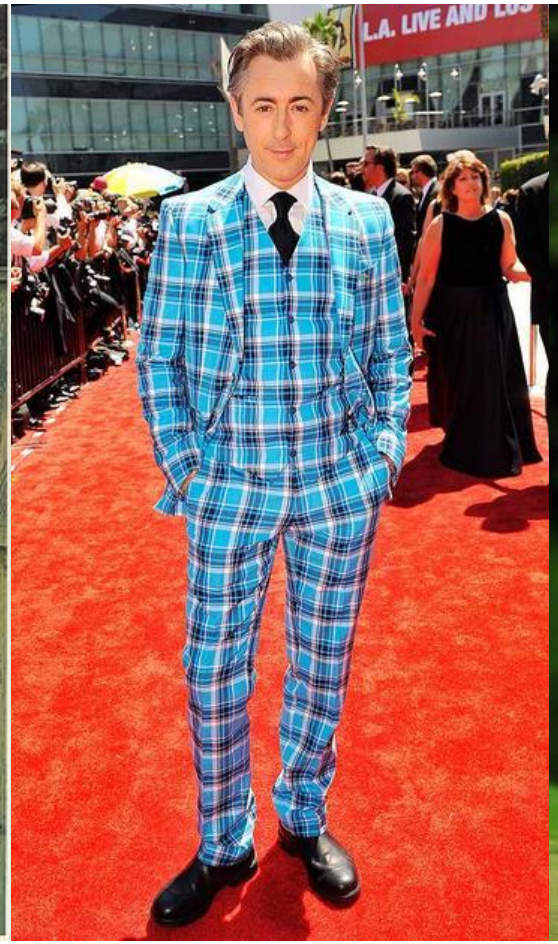
- How is positive psychology going to assist in 'making life better'?
  - What?
  - Who?
  - How?
  - When?

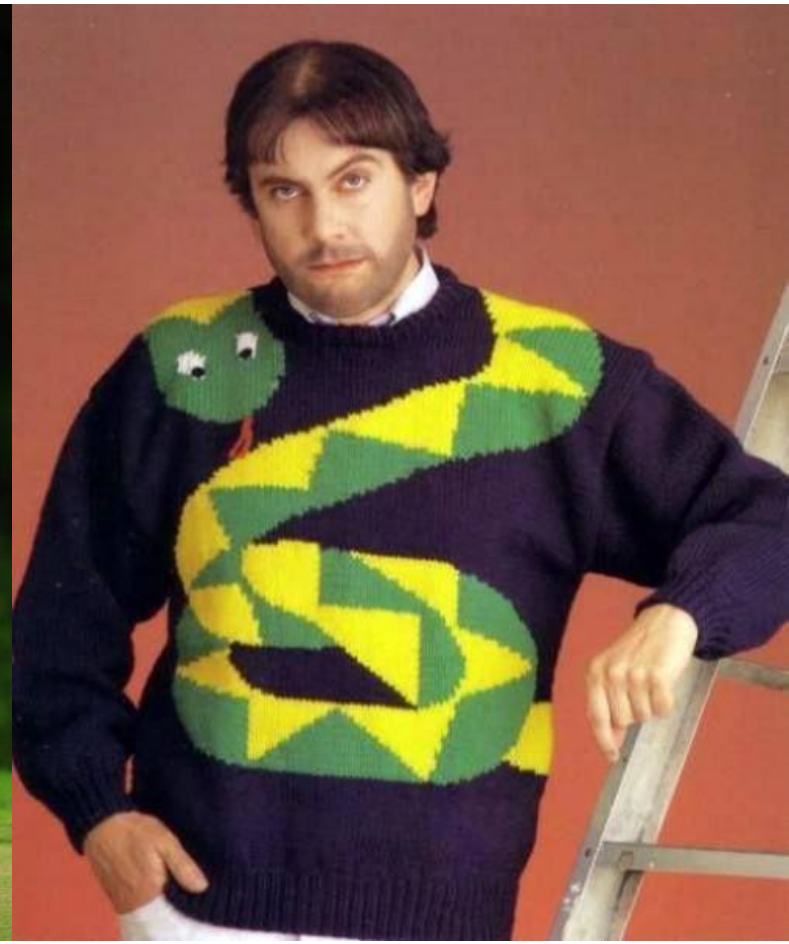
Context

- The world has many problems (climate change, inequality, over population, food/water scarcity, high complexity and pace/rate of change, mental illbeing, etc., and of course poor fashion sense…).
- The world is changing (AI, new ways of working, new technologies, enhanced communications, new luxury, block chain, etc.).
- Positive psychology has problems (e.g., lack of integration, leadership, disciplinary silo), but also strengths.
- There is a direct link with positive psychology helping with problems, and building a better future for all.

Poor fashion sense







The future...

Given our current challenges, and what we can reasonably expect to happen in the future, what role can positive psychology play in shaping this future for the better?

How can positive psychology "*make life better*" to quote Dr Tim Lomas?

What is the purpose of positive psychology?

How is positive psychology going to ‘make life better’?

- Ten (mostly new-ish) ways positive psychology can thrive and have more impact:
  1. Simplifying messaging.
  2. Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory.
  3. Start a movement - beyond academia.
  4. More people (let’s teach it), more passion.
  5. Better dissemination: Media, public policy, organisations, schools.
  6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better: Supercharge them, focus on the individual *and* system.
  7. More collaborative plan.
  8. Address the critics.
  9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology.
  10. Make some conceptual friends.

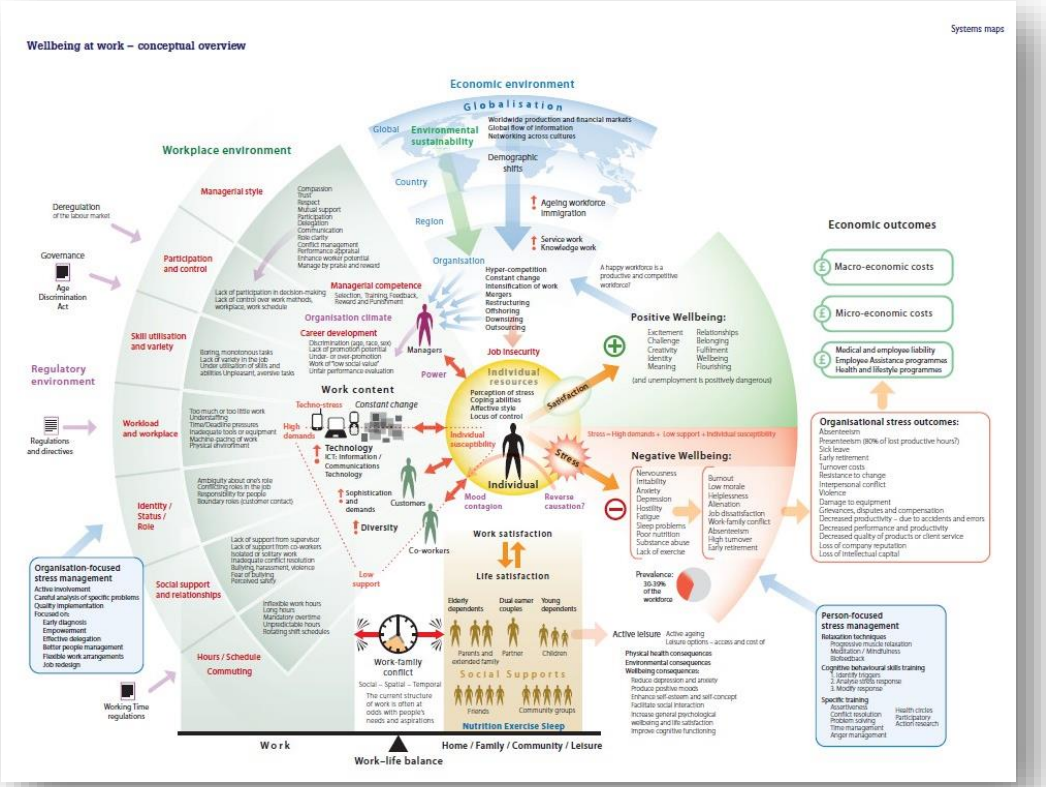
How is positive psychology going to 'make life

In short, we need
better and wider application!!!

9. Address the critics.
9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology.
10. Make some friends.

Ways positive psychology can make life better…

1. Simplifying messaging:



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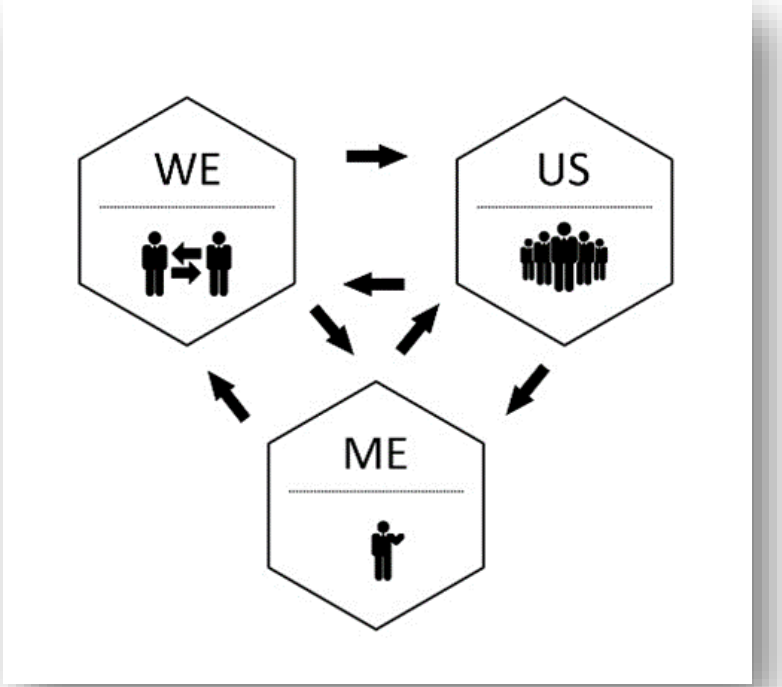
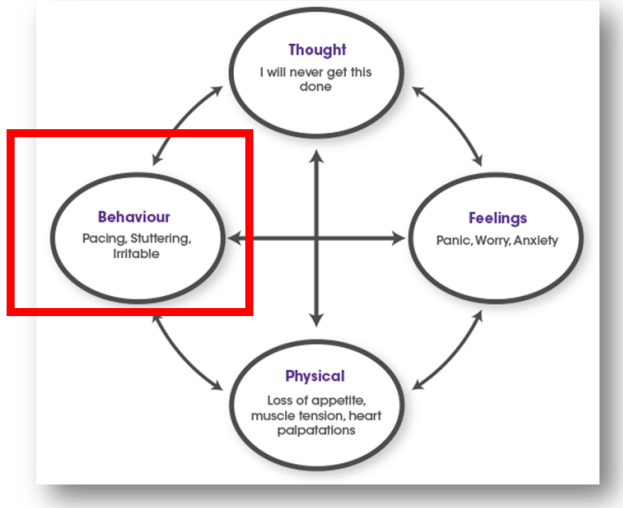
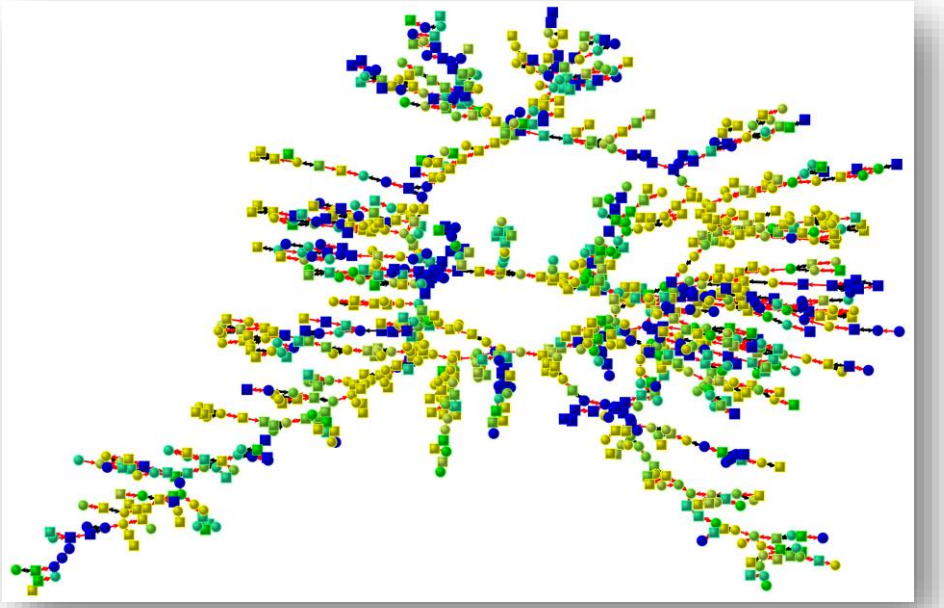


Ways positive psychology can make life better…

2. Better studies:
   - More complex research designs – observational data, self-report, biological markers, behavioural data, time-series studies.
   - Social network analysis.
   - Sophisticated measurement.



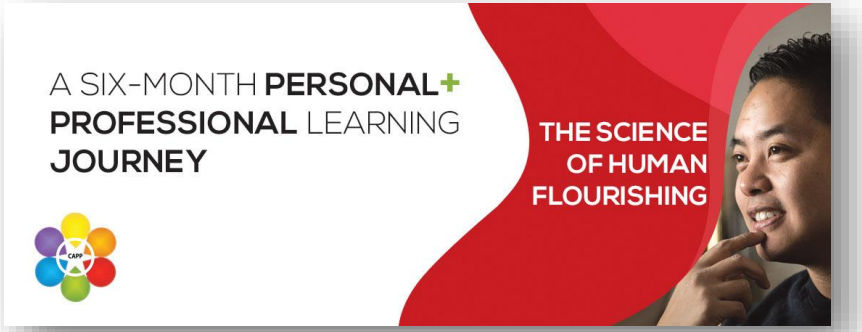


Ways positive psychology can make life better…

3. Start a movement:
   - Beyond academia…
   - Check out this video...
   - Protest for wellbeing?

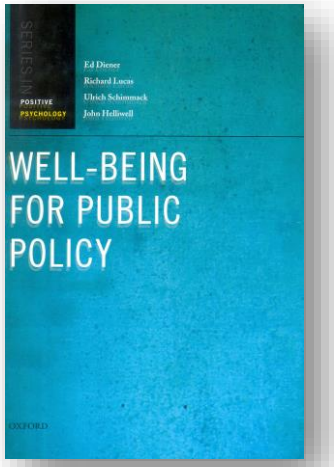
Ways positive psychology can make life better…

4. More people, more passion:
   - Let's teach it.
   - How do we enable these people?



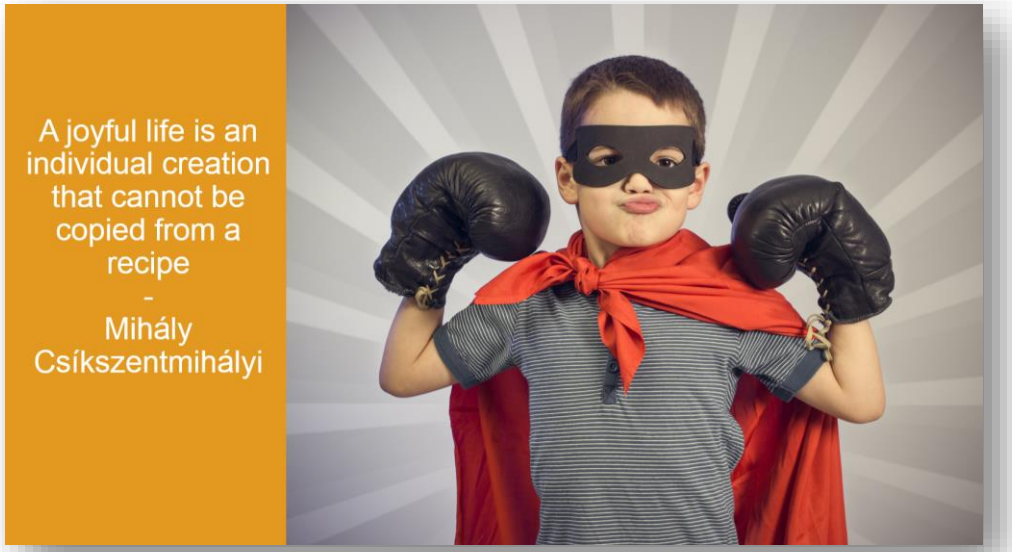
Ways positive psychology can make life better…

5. Better dissemination:
   - Social media, public policy, organisations, schools.
   - International ‘Wellbeing and Public Policy’ conference series.
   - Free open access journals: e.g., International Journal of Wellbeing.



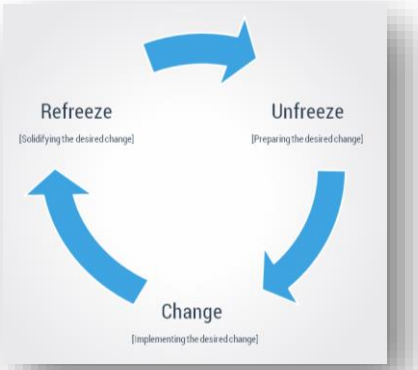
Ways positive psychology can make life better…

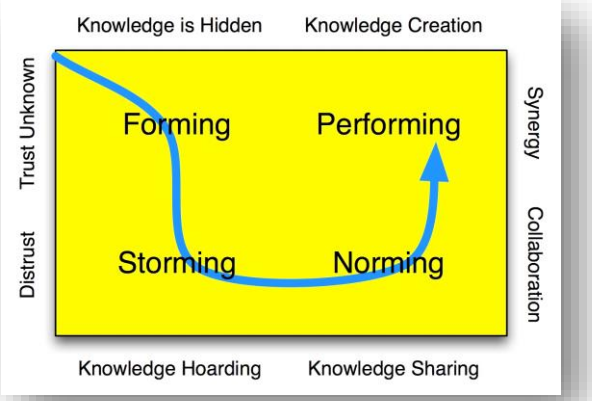
6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better:
   - Less one-size-fits-all interventions.
   - Authentic delivery.
   - More experiential learning (activities).
   - More group-based learning.
   - Supportive environments for change.
   - Better evaluation.
   - Longer term impact (e.g., china).
   - Efficacy vs effectiveness.
   - Selling false hope.
   - Super charge interventions and make them portable.
   - Systems informed and co-designed.



Ways positive psychology can make life better…

7. More collaborative plan:
   - We needed everyone in the room…
   - We need to understand how change happens - change management frameworks (e.g., Theory of Change), and that change is always difficult, even if it is change for the better…
   - At the moment we have thrown things up in the air and don't know where they are going to land…

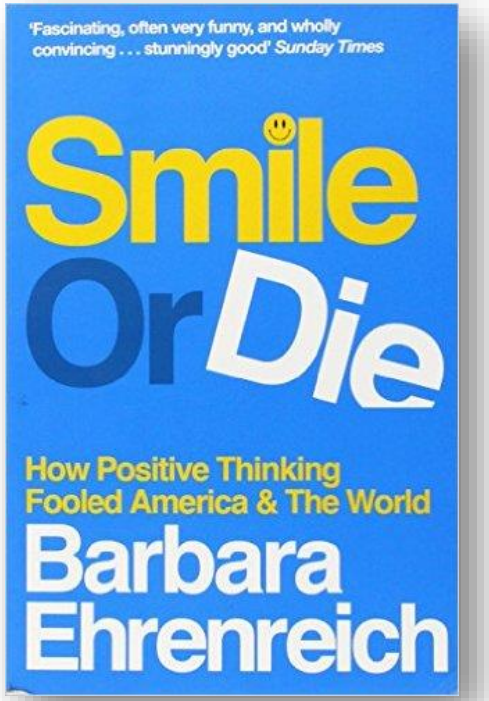




CRITICS

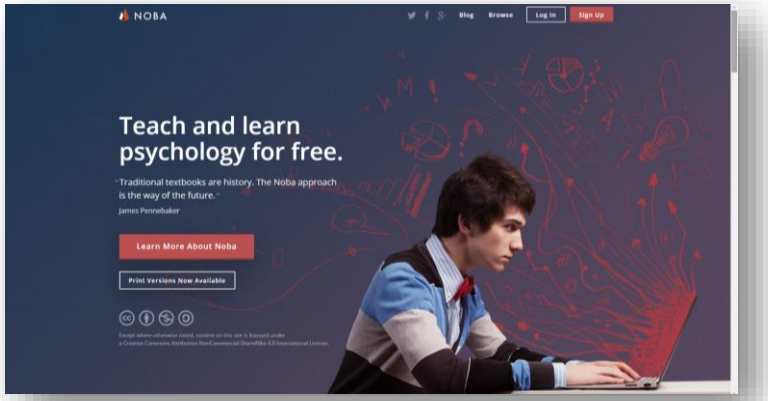
Ways positive psychology can make life better…

8. Address the critics better:
   - Regardless of their bad fashion sense. →



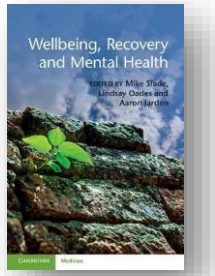
Ways positive psychology can make life better…

9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology:
   - E.g., Noba Project.
   - E.g., Happify, Work on Wellbeing.



Ways positive psychology can make life better…

10. Make some friends:
    - With the helping professions:
      - Slade, M., Oades, L., & Jarden, A. (2016). *Wellbeing, recovery and mental health*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
      - *"Slade, Oades, and Jarden have fostered a long-overdue conversation within this book – between clinicians focusing on recovery, and positive psychologists focusing on well-being. Although the first group has traditionally focused on returning clients to baseline, the other group has tried to leave the baseline behind, for new heights of well-being. The upshot of the conversation is this: That the processes bringing recovery and the processes bringing well-being are much the same, though they have been focused on in isolation"*. – Ken Sheldon



    - With coaching psychologists:
      - Motivation theories can help us understand how to get the best out of ourselves and others – one of the essential goals of positive psychology.
    - With other disciplines – philosophy, economics, public policy, health, education, etc…
    - With the social psychologists:
      - Just because they are fun to hang out with…

Ways positive psychology can make life better…

- So:
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  2. Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory.
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We need to focus more on what success looks like for positive psychology…

And how this success helps with real world problems!

We need useful Applied Positive Psychology…

Summing up…

- With regard to building a better future for the world and positive psychology and its application, if we simplify our messaging, design better studies, teach about our topic more widely, go beyond academia, focus on how we disseminate our messages, design and tailor our interventions better, front to the critics, embrace technology, and make some conceptual friends - this is a good way to get there and make an impact on some of our global challenges.
- And of course, we hope for better fashion sense also…

Although I might not be part of this; my wife lives in hope…

Summing up…

- Let’s think big, be bold, be creative, be authentic, be targeted, and most of all be collaborative.
- Sure we all have problems, but there are a lot of things on the horizon to be optimistic about and hopeful for – both for humans and for positive psychology.

Thank you

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