

16

# INCREIBLE PSYCHOLOGISTS

## PART 1

An eBook showcasing leading psychologists who have spoken  
at our *Happiness & Its Causes*, *Mind & Its Potential* and  
*Young Minds* conferences

# Overview



Anyone who has attended one or more of our conferences over the years will know that our speaker line-up always includes a terrific variety of individuals working and excelling in a range of disciplines. There are neuroscientists, educators, artists, philosophers, spiritual teachers and of course, many many psychologists including those hailed as trail blazers in their fields, among them the founder of positive psychology, Dr Martin Seligman; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, best known as the architect of the notion of flow, and Professor Ellen Langer, described as the 'mother of mindfulness'.

So many psychologists, in fact, with so much valuable information to impart, that we thought it high time we compiled this latest two part eBook series for you, featuring 16 incredible psychologists.

Each eBook will showcase the work and knowledge of eight incredible men and women specialising in everything from ageing, flow and willpower, to narcissism, mindfulness and marriage success.

**Part one of an eBook featuring leading psychologists who have spoken at our *Happiness & Its Causes, Mind & Its Potential* and *Young Minds* conferences.**

Plus you'll find links to the original blogs with additional content, as well as links to all source material consisting of media interviews and conference presentations.

Featured in this eBook are:

- 1. Dr Martin Seligman**
- 2. Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**
- 3. Dr Timothy Sharp**
- 4. Professor Jean Twenge**
- 5. Professor Ellen Langer**
- 6. Dr Roy Baumeister**
- 7. Professor Barbara Fredrickson**
- 8. Dr Robert Biswas-Diener**

We hope you enjoy this free feast of reading and learning with part 2 to be published soon.





# Dr Martin Seligman

## PERMA = a culture of flourishing

Two extremely influential thinkers, Sigmund Freud and Arthur Schopenhauer, essentially told us the best we can ever hope for in life is not to be miserable. This might resonate for some, but many others prefer a more edifying worldview. One is that espoused by founder of Positive Psychology [Dr Martin Seligman](#), namely that a sustained state of flourishing and wellbeing “well over and above the absence of misery” is a plausible individual and national goal.

## The acronym that can change your life

In his presentation at [Happiness & Its Causes 2012](#), Seligman argues the case for [PERMA](#), the five constituents of wellbeing. These are positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment/achievement. Each one, he says, can be increased and improved on; each one is measurable and all can be taught.

Take engagement, defined by Seligman as being in the flow “when our highest strengths are just matched to the challenges that come our way.” If one of our goals is to increase the amount of flow in our lives, Seligman advises we first need to identify our signature strengths (e.g. bravery, vitality, leadership, creativity, humour and so on); then, having identified these, to notice what happens when we bring one or more of them to bear on our difficulties.

## PERMA goes global

Just as PERMA can be cultivated at an individual level, large organisations can also benefit, and so it’s “a stepping stone to the possibility that the planet could flourish,” enthuses Seligman.

Consider the US military’s [Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness](#) program, designed to teach soldiers the principles of positive psychology. As expected, soldiers enrolled in the program are stronger psychologically and have lower suicide attempts and ideation than troops that aren’t.

Seligman notes that in the 1450s, Florence became immensely wealthy due mainly to Medici banking genius and that during this time under the leadership of Cosimo ‘the elder’, the question was asked, ‘what should we do with all our wealth?’ Seligman proposes that we too are “at a Florentine moment. The question is what are we going to do with this wealth? I’m going to suggest we [use it] to increase the wellbeing on the planet.”

Read the full blog [here](#).

Dr Martin Seligman also presented at [Mind & Its Potential 2009](#).





# Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

## In the flow

If to forget oneself is to experience bliss, what can we do to more easily cultivate this state? The answer lies in research pioneered by [Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#), one of the greatest psychologists of our time. [Link to both his preos – Fidler too.](#)

As Csikszentmihalyi explains [here](#), when he started on his quest 40 years ago to better comprehend the causes of happiness, he “began to look at creative people ... trying to understand what made them feel that it was worth essentially spending their life doing things for which many of them didn’t expect either fame or fortune.”

One person he interviewed was a composer who described feeling ecstatic whenever he composed music. Csikszentmihalyi was intrigued by his use of the word ‘ecstatic’, which in Greek means “simply to stand to the side of something.”

Or to put it another way, this composer entered an alternative reality. Not only that, he claimed to lose all sense of himself in the process. Not just figuratively either. Csikszentmihalyi says this is what literally happens because “our nervous system is incapable of processing more than 110 bits of information.” That’s not very much – especially when you consider we apparently need 60 bits per second merely to process what someone is saying.

Given creative endeavours use up even more bits, it’s no wonder those poets, writers, painters and musicians who report experiencing total immersion in their craft, don’t “have enough attention left over” for the usual human preoccupations, says Csikszentmihalyi adding that “their body disappears from their consciousness because they don’t have enough attention to do well something that requires a lot of concentration, and at the same time to feel that they exist.”

What we now know about these fully absorbing ‘flow states’ as famously coined by Csikszentmihalyi is that anyone can ‘get in the zone’ under the right circumstances – specifically when we encounter a challenge that tests our skills, and yet our skills and capacities are such that we’re able to meet this challenge.

Which brings us to what Csikszentmihalyi says is the real crux of the issue and that is “how to put more and more of everyday life in that flow channel.”

Read the full blog [here](#).

Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi presented at [Happiness & Its Causes 2014](#). He was also interviewed by Richard Fidler and that footage is available [here](#).





# Dr Timothy Sharp

## Positive ageing

Those who've read *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley will recall the disdain its eternally young and vital society shows towards the elderly, any individual who on reaching age 60 is deemed economically useless and subsequently euthanized. Yet Huxley was quite prescient in how he portrayed our attitudes towards old people because even though prejudice against senior citizens isn't as extreme today as what's depicted in his book, it's certainly still prevalent according to founder of the Happiness Institute, [Dr Timothy Sharp](#), presenting at [Happiness & Its Causes 2014](#).

In fact, just last year the Australian Human Rights Commission released [a report](#) on the problem of age discrimination, looking specifically at the media's presentation of older Australians. Unfortunately the worthless, angry, sad and useless old fogey stereotype persists, says Sharp, even though "it's not helpful and it's not the truth." On the contrary, many elderly folk worldwide "are functional, are healthy, are happy."

Not only that, the older you are the *happier* you're likely to be. Sharp says "there's a significant body of research, several well controlled and very well conducted studies that show happiness can actually increase with age."

It's also heartening to be reminded that many men and women peak creatively, professionally, even physically long past their so-called prime.

We all want to live forever but not if we're in pain or can't remember our spouse's name or what a teapot is for. Hence considerable research is focused on finding out what promotes not just longevity but a mentally and physically healthy life. Sharp says scientists have learned a lot from the so-called [Blue Zones](#), "hot spots around the world where there's a significantly higher proportion of centenarians, and significantly lower rates of some of the illnesses and diseases that we sometimes associate with old age."

"So what scientists, sociologists, anthropologists have done is to study these people. The good news is we've learned a lot from them, and they're simple things that we can all do and the sooner we start them the better. It's never too late. Every day we do these things we advance our tomorrow."

Read the full blog [here](#).

Dr Timothy Sharp also presented at [Happiness & Its Causes 2011](#) and [Young Minds 2013](#), and he will participate in a panel discussion **Surviving and Thriving** at [Happiness & Its Causes 2015](#).







# Professor Jean Twenge

## The narcissism epidemic

There's a lot of talk about the rise in unhealthy self-love amongst the millennial generation (those born in the 1980s and 1990s). One factor often cited as proof of this trend is the heavy use by many young adults of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

One person who's concerned about this relationship between digital technology and what she regards as excessive self-focus in today's youth is [Professor Jean Twenge](#), a psychologist and leading researcher into narcissism and youth mental health. She is one of several interviewees invited on [this program](#) to discuss the topic.

According to Twenge, American youth (and by extrapolation their counterparts in Australia) are in the grip of a narcissism epidemic. "We have rising plastic surgery rates, we have this obsession with fame and celebrity, we have more materialistic values than we used to," she says.

Twenge describes several within-campus studies she's been involved in to try "to find out what the generational change [is] in narcissism." To this end, about 50,000 college students between 1982 and 2009 have filled out the [Narcissistic Personality Inventory](#), a commonly used measure of narcissistic traits in individuals.

What Twenge and her team found, after analysing this data, is that where previously only about 17 percent of students scored very high in narcissism, that figure has now leapt to 30 percent bearing in mind that narcissistic characteristics present in individuals to varying degrees, with Narcissistic Personality Disorder at one end of the spectrum and good old fashioned vanity at the other.

But as Twenge says, "Even if it's just at the personality trait level, and not at that clinical [disorder] level, there are a number of problems with it", for example, the toxic influence it has on relationships.

And yes, given the increase in narcissism has been most marked since 2005-2006, Twenge has no qualms pointing the finger at what she regards as the combined effects of Internet technology, in particular social networking sites, with easy credit, celebrity-drenched media and permissive parenting.

But perhaps even more alarming is the impact all this is having on the younger generations' capacity for empathy. Twenge explains, "People are anonymous and they have the chance just to be very cruel to each other, and they tend to take that chance."

Read the full blog [here](#).

Professor Twenge presented at [Happiness & Its Causes 2014](#).





# Professor Ellen Langer

## Mindfulness really matters

I can be so mindless. Like the time I bought a train ticket from the vending machine but was so preoccupied I could only remember inserting my money. I had no recollection of actually taking my ticket or storing it in my wallet. I even complained to the stationmaster who was midway through dismantling the machine on my behalf when, rummaging in my wallet I located – with considerable embarrassment – my newly purchased \$3.50 return to the city.

I'm sorry to say this kind of thing happens to me a lot although I'm by no means alone in my experience of heightened distractedness. Pioneering psychologist [Professor Ellen Langer](#) has spent much of her professional life studying human health through the lens of her theory of mindfulness. According to Langer, “virtually all of us all the time aren't there.”

Langer defines mindlessness as essentially being on automatic pilot. “The past determines the present; your rules and routines govern rather than just guide what you do.” She presented at [Happiness & Its Causes 2012](#).

Mindfulness, on the other hand, “is so simple it almost defies belief.” In this mind state, your rules and routines guide rather than govern what you do. You're present, you pay attention, you notice new things, you become engaged and most important of all, you realise that everything is in constant flux.

The consequences of being in one state or the other are enormous. Langer, whose work centres on increasing mindfulness in different scenarios and then observing what happens, notes the effects of ‘being here now’ are utterly transformational, and that everything in our life, including our physical and mental health, benefits.

Conversely, mindlessness or constricting mindsets, bind us to absolutes, the antithesis of the infinite possibility inherent in “not knowing”. Langer challenges us to consider why we're “so sure we can't improve vision beyond 20/20, think ourselves thin, reverse virtually all brain damage?” Her point is that *all* things change, and that when we take this truth of impermanence and ultimate unknowability to heart, we grow exponentially our potential for happiness and healing.

Read the blog [here](#).

## Decision Fatigue: *Choosing While Depleted*

- Postpone/avoid decision
- Less compromise
- Default option
- Impulse, self-interest
- Irrational behavior

YOUNG  
MINDS.





# Dr Roy Baumeister

## The science of willpower

Imagine what a mess we'd make if instead of restraining ourselves every time we were tempted to seduce a married friend, eat an entire ricotta cheesecake, or tell our boss what we really think, we just went ahead and did it?

Or indeed the kind of anarchic society we'd live in if the majority of us didn't have the wherewithal to keep our even more unreasonable and outrageous cravings in check?

Yet few really understand self-control or its active ingredient willpower. Which is what makes listening to [Dr Roy Baumeister](#) presenting at [Young Minds 2012](#), such a treat. Baumeister is a respected social psychologist who has worked extensively in the area of self-control and self-regulation, which he defines as the capacity to change and/or control your thoughts, emotions and impulses.

According to Baumeister, "we are using our self-control all day every day to resist lots of desires". To break it down, we spend eight hours a day actively desiring, three to four of those hours resisting what we want and "a glorious guilt ridden half an hour" succumbing to a yearning we previously resisted.

But what's really interesting is studies and real-life observations revealing that the basic energy (willpower) we use in self-control is finite within a set period of time. That is after exerting self-control once, if presented with another demand for self-control soon after, chances are we'll cave in.

Not only that, making decisions, showing initiative, taking action ... all seem to draw on the same energy resource. Which perhaps explains why people in positions of power and responsibility so often become mired in scandal. Politicians, for example, having to make big decisions every day tend to deplete their store of willpower. Baumeister suggests this is why so many do the silly and embarrassing things the rest of us end up hearing about.

If there's one take home message in all of this, it's that people with impressive self-control don't resist desires more often. They avoid temptation in the first place.

Read the full blog [here](#).

Dr Roy Baumeister also presented at [Happiness & Its Causes 2014](#).





# Professor Barbara Fredrickson

## Are you positive?

Think back on the last 24 hours and recall all the things you've done that made your heart sing. Perhaps you caught up with a close friend. Maybe you took some time out to play with your child. Or perhaps you simply took yourself off to a park or the beach to be quiet and enjoy the tranquility of nature.

Now ask yourself if during any of these pursuits you felt more connected, optimistic, energised, creative, vital? This is the question that interests [Professor Barbara Fredrickson](#), acclaimed positive emotions researcher and best-selling author of *Positivity and Love 2.0*. Fredrickson is being interviewed here (click on Parts [1](#), [2](#) & [3](#)) about her research into the short and long-term transformative effects such mind states have on a person's way of being.

Her thesis is that when folk experience positive emotions they have "a broader scope of attention. This allows [them] to take in more information, see more connections ... and be more creative as a result ... [This] fundamentally transforms people."

Fredrickson and her team have proven this in the lab. But first they had to find "a way to induce positive emotions day in day out that wouldn't grow stale." The method they settled on was the practice of meditation or mindfulness due to the ever-growing body of evidence that being present and attentive to the here and now "actually allows positive experiences to stay fresh."

Two hundred adults were subsequently recruited, some of whom were assigned to a meditation group. All subjects were then tracked over a three-month period. After just three weeks, there was a blossoming of positive emotions in those meditating every day. More significant, after three months, these participants were, overall, much happier and less self-interested than previously.

And as studies have borne out repeatedly, being happy and more outward looking benefits you in a myriad of ways: you live longer, you love more expansively, you enjoy better health and you thrive at work.

What's Fredrickson's advice to those of us wanting to habitually experience more positive emotions with a view to changing ourselves for the better? Make the effort to do exactly that. It's up to us.

Read the full blog [here](#).

Professor Barbara Fredrickson has presented at [Happiness & Its Causes 2010](#) and [Young Minds 2012](#) and will present a full day pre-conference workshop **Love 2.0 – Creating Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection**, and participate in a panel discussion **Love, Compassion & Ethics: A Dialogue with the Dalai Lama** at [Happiness & Its Causes 2015](#).







# Dr Robert Biswas-Diener

## Unlocking the mysteries of psychological wealth

Widely known as the 'Indiana Jones of positive psychology', [Dr Robert Biswas-Diener](#) travels the world and studies happiness for a living. In [this presentation](#) at *Happiness & Its Causes 2011*, he divulges some of his more interesting research findings.

For example, that when material life is lived relatively close to the bone, folk are actually more content because it's easier to set standards that everyone can meet. The Maasai people in Kenya are a case in point. Their answers "topped the chart" when he asked them to rank their life satisfaction, self worth and other measures of happiness.

Yet it's his research findings after spending time in the slums of Calcutta that are probably most surprising to Biswas-Diener, who asked slum residents to score on a scale from one to seven their satisfaction with various domains in their life, both material (food, income, housing, health etc.) and self-related (morality, physical appearance, intelligence etc.). Biswas-Diener says, "These people have complaints about their material quality of life. But this is also a story about people who are hugely satisfied with themselves. They don't care that they live in poverty where their sense of self is concerned."

Biswas-Diener jokes that when he told his Indian hosts he came from the US, they apologised, mock pitying him because, as they put it, "you have so much money but all it does is separate you from one another." Quite unlike their own experience where living cheek to jowl due to lack of resources means family and community ties are generally much stronger than they are in the west. And yes, this is to our detriment, says Biswas-Diener, who shares some data that shows very clearly that the more we value and prioritise money over love, the unhappier we are.

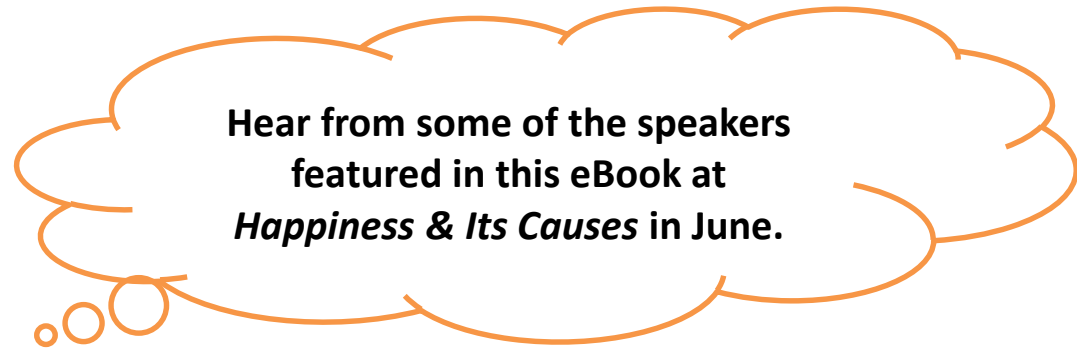
Yet despite all the research into happiness he's done, Biswas-Diener says he's probably learnt the most not from the science per se but from personal experience, particularly that involving his own clumsy interactions with other people. That when we bungle our relationships as we frequently do, "life gives us so many second chances, the opportunity to do over again and again, countless times, until at last we get it right."

Read the full blog [here](#).

Dr Robert Biswas-Diener will present a session **The Upside of Your Dark Side**, and half day post-conference workshop **Overcoming 'Comfort Addiction'** as well as participate in a panel discussion **Can Anger be a Force for Good** at [Happiness & Its Causes 2015](#).

# HAPPINESS & its causes

10 & 11 June 2015 | Luna Park, Sydney  
[www.happinessanditscauses.com.au](http://www.happinessanditscauses.com.au)



## **Professor Barbara Fredrickson**

Acclaimed positive emotions researcher and best-selling author of *Positivity* and *Love 2.0* [LINK](#).

Barbara will present a full day pre-conference workshop **Love 2.0 – Creating Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection**, and participate in a panel discussion **Love, Compassion & Ethics: A Dialogue with the Dalai Lama**.

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Robert will present a session **The Upside of Your Dark Side**, and half day post-conference workshop **Overcoming 'Comfort Addiction'** as well as participate in a panel discussion **Can Anger be a Force for Good**.

## **Dr Timothy Sharp**

Leading psychologist focusing on enhancing happiness [LINK](#).

Tim will participate in a panel discussion **Surviving and Thriving**.

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