



## Editorial

by **Tharina Guse**  
Guest Editor

### Special Edition on Positive Psychology and Phenomenology

This Special Edition of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* has a broad thematic focus on qualitative research in Positive Psychology, which, at its core, is concerned with the study of human flourishing and well-being. Positive Psychology focuses on personal strengths and virtues, as well as processes and conditions which could contribute to optimal functioning. At its inception as a field of enquiry, Seligman (1999) linked Positive Psychology to the rich philosophical traditions of exploring the “good life”. While quantitative studies in the field have burgeoned, qualitative studies have been lagging behind (Donaldson, Dollwet & Rao, 2014; Rich, 2016). Adding to our understanding of “human messiness and complexity” (Hefferon, 2014) in exploring human well-being, this edition provides some insight into phenomenology as a method of qualitative enquiry. In the process, it explores experiences and processes of well-being of adult and child participants in research studies.

In the first paper, Graham du Plessis and Carolina du Plessis eloquently elaborate, using the metaphor of a cake, on Seligman’s (1999) reference to psychology as being only half-baked without considering positive functioning. The authors argue cogently for the inclusion of phenomenological methods in qualitative research in the field of Positive Psychology. Du Plessis and Du Plessis draw on two papers previously published in the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* (Bredmar, 2013; Finlay, 2012) to illustrate the potential usefulness of the methods of phenomenology in exploring Positive Psychology constructs. Specifically, these two papers provide vivid examples of how current understandings of posttraumatic growth and well-being respectively can be supplemented through the use of phenomenological methods of inquiry.

Moving towards professional psychology, Lindi Nel and Paul Fouché describe the professional and personal development of a student psychologist through the implementation of interpretative phenomenological analysis, focusing on his positive experiences in the training context. Much research on becoming a therapist has focused on stressors and negative experiences (e.g., Green & Hawley, 2009), and yet this period could also provide opportunity for personal growth, especially when positive psychology principles are integrated with professional training (Guse, 2010). In this paper, Nel and Fouché provide an account of how one student in a South African professional training programme experienced enhanced well-being in his journey towards becoming a psychologist.

As the next contribution illustrates, qualitative methods in Positive Psychology are equally relevant to research with children, and yet literature in this area remains limited (Wong, Wong, & Oben, 2012). In the third paper of this Special Edition, Chiara Ruini, Francesca Vescovelli, Veronica Carpi and Licia Masoni illustrate how story-telling and fairy tales can be used to explore well-being among school-aged children. As part of the study, children were invited to construct their own fairy tales focused on eliciting positive emotions. Ruini et al., implementing a qualitative analysis using Grounded Theory, conclude that interpersonal relationships with peers and family members were most important to the happiness and well-being of the children involved.

In the final paper, Pravani Naidoo provides a uniquely insightful view, through the eyes of their carers, on the everyday lives of two children with cerebral palsy. In particular, the children’s mothers, teachers and therapists shared their observations on the children’s embodied

experiences and interactions. Implementing Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström's (2008) phenomenological approach of reflective lifeworld research, Naidoo found that, despite having quite profound forms of disability, the children effectively utilised their bodily and psychosocial resources towards experiences of enhanced autonomy and a sense of mastery, flourishing as such. Through this contribution, further possibilities for studying disability in the context of Positive Psychology, using the perspectives and methods of phenomenology,

are highlighted.

In conclusion, this Special Edition has as its aim the opening up of avenues for exploring experiences of well-being in various settings and contexts through implementing qualitative research. As Rich (2016) has argued, qualitative research is crucial to the development of Positive Psychology as a discipline. These papers are contributions in this direction, and I hope that you will find them as thought-provoking as I have.

## Referencing Format

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## About the Author



Tharina Guse  
Associate Professor, Department of Psychology  
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

E-mail address: [tguse@uj.ac.za](mailto:tguse@uj.ac.za)

Tharina Guse is an Associate Professor of Psychology, and previous Head of the Department of Psychology, at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

She is a registered Counselling Psychologist and a member of the Professional Board for Psychology of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

Professor Guse obtained the degrees MA (Counselling Psychology) (cum laude) (1989) and PhD (Psychology) (2003) from North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Her research interests include positive psychology interventions, psychological well-being, and hypnotherapy. She also conducts research on hope, gratitude and well-being in the African context.

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