NWU® | OPTENTIA

News

Enabling optimal expression of individual, social and institutional potential

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Special points of interest:

* Optentia has doubled its article equivalent outputs in 2020 (compared to 2019).
* The research entity has successfully implemented and Online SLP in Research Design in 2021.
* More than 500 people have attended workshops and webinars hosted by Optentia in the first quarter of 2021.
* Prof. Jaco Hoffman played a key role in obtaining funding for a research project on the Care economy.

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An Evolving Strategy and an Enduring Identity

Policy-makers, researchers, employers, and governments are increasingly becoming interested in the well-being of individuals, organisations, governments, and communities. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives and work of individuals dramatically. Studying the pathways to well-being of individuals, organisations, communities and nations are therefore critical.

Optentia focuses on pathways to the flourishing of individuals and institutions. We recorded the highest number of peer-reviewed publications in our ten-year history during 2020. We developed and implemented an online short learning programme in research design which is vital for developing capable postgraduate students and staff members. Researchers and PhD students in Optentia address relevant topics. In March 2021, the research entity was internally evaluated by the North-West University, and we applied for an upgrade from a focus area to a research unit.

In the turbulent world, it is critical to continuously adapt our strategy. However, it is necessary to be mentally fit. Mental fitness is a state of well-being and having a positive sense of how we feel, think, and act. But what does it take to be mentally fit? According to Adam Grant, mental fitness refers to the ability to rethink and unlearn. Rethinking is part of a scientist mindset. This mindset can be contrasted with three other mindsets, namely:

- Preacher: Delivering sermons to protect and promote our ideals.
- Politician: Seeking to win over an audience.
- Prosecutor: Recognising flaws in others' arguments.

According to Adam Grant, the rethinking cycle starts with intellectual **humility** (knowing what we do not know). Recognising our shortcomings opens the door to **doubt**. Questioning our current understanding enables us to become **curious** about what information is missing, which leads to **discovery**. In the coming months and years, we will continuously have to evaluate and update our strategy. However, as Adam Grant (2021) suggests, visions for change are more compelling when they include visions of continuity: Our strategy might change while our identity will endure.

Although different participants in our research entity might use different words to describe the identity of our entity, they will probably mention the following words: respectful, autonomous, inclusive, engaging, collaborative and innovating. While we plan and implement new strategies this year, we will retain our identity. However, we have to be actively open-minded - searching for reasons why we might be wrong, rather than for reasons why we are right, and revise our views based on what we learn.

We look forward to an exciting year!

Performance of Optentia: 2020

On 31 March 2021, Optentia had 35 Members (23 with doctoral degrees), and five support staff members. Furthermore, 40 extraordinary professors and 6 extraordinary researchers are appointed on a temporary basis. A total of 84 Master's students, 35 PhD students, and three post-doctoral research fellows. From 1 May to 30 November 2020, a total of 23 Master's and three PhD students have completed their studies. We have produced 84.63 peer-reviewed article equivalents (of which 10.57 were chapters in books). A total of 14.87% of the articles published were in national journals, while rest were published in international journals.

"We produced 84.63 peer-reviewed articles and chapters during 2020."

The Optentia Scorecard *by* Prof. Ian Rothmann

Output	2018	2019	2020	2021
Peer-reviewed publications	79	104	190	61
PR equivalents	30.00	35.38	84.63	
National PR articles	5.53	10.27	12.59	
Papers: Conferences	17	35	1	
Participating Master's students	46	56	96	
Completed Master's students	26	40	23	
Participating PhD students	34	29	35	37
Completed PhD students	12	7	3-1	
Post-doctoral fellows	6	3	3	3
Number of workshops presented	25	10	9	5
Number of workshop participants	750	478	473	554

Note: Outputs as on 31 March 2021 ** May 2020-April 2021

Capability Development at Optentia

Optentia has already presented various webinars and programmes to build the competencies of participants. These webinars include the following:

- Online Short Learning Programme (SLP) in Research Design (160 participants).
- Longitudinal Structural Equation Modelling in Mplus (15 participants).
- Launch Online SLP in Research Design (289 participants).
- COVID-19 Pandemic: From Global Crisis to a Better World (110 participants).

The following workshops will be presented during the next three months:

- Book Launch: Does Community Development Work? - Prof. Lucius Botes and Prof. Peter Westoby.
- Online Short Learning Programme (SLP) in Research Design.
- Missing Value Analysis.
- Multilevel Analysis in Mplus.
- Atlas-TI.
- Atlas-TI for literature reviews.

Optentia researchers should contact Prof. Ian Rothmann to discuss their training needs.

"The Online SLP in Research Design is presented three times per year."

Registration: Online Short Learning Programme (SLP) in Research Design

The Online SLP in Research Design is presented three times per year:

- Cycle 1: January to April
- Cycle 2: May to July
- Cycle 3: August to November.

To register for the Online SLP in Research Design, navigate to the Optentia website (Education) and click on Short learning programmes. You will find a link to the registration on the webpage. Please make sure that you work through the information about the Online SLP in Research Design before your register. Contact Lynn Booysen for information about the cost and administrative arrangements regarding the SLP.

Enablers at Optentia

In addition to knowledge and skill development, Optentia values the enablement and efficacy of researchers and postgraduate students. The following staff members contribute to enablement of researchers: Marinda Malan (financial administration), Lynn Booysen (office administration, logistics, workshops, and SLPs, Soraya Harding (postgraduate support), Elizabeth Bothma (statistical consultation, and Anjonet Jordaan (funding applications and marketing). We recently acquired eight new computers in the Optentia Indaba Room. We have 15 computers available for training purposes. Please contact the Optentia support team if you need support with research-related matters.

Introducing Dr Jess Auerbach: New Optentia Participant

Dr Jess Auerbach joined Optentia during March 2021. Jess is an interdisciplinary researcher based in anthropology. She is developing the field of 'knowledge mobilities' to allow her to explore histories of knowledge as they pertain to educational curricula and socio-political currents of thought and action.

Her current research explores undersea internet cables that link Africa through the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean Island systems. This builds on ethnographic research conducted in Mauritius whilst a visiting researcher at the Open University of Mauritius in 2019, and in Angola-Brazil whilst a PhD student at Stanford. She is the author of the forthcoming edited volume The Archive of Kindness: the Other Side of the Covid-19 Pandemic in South Africa (Briza: 2021) and the monograph 'From Water to Wine: Becoming Middle Class in Angola' (U Toronto Press, 2020). In addition to the Stanford PhD, she holds an MSc in Forced Migration from Oxford where she was a Rhodes Scholar at St Antony's College, and an undergraduate degree from UCT.

Dr Jess Auerbach

Optentia welcomes Dr Auerbach. We look forward to her contributions in the programme on Technology, Capability and Functioning!

"Jess is developing the field of 'knowledge mobilities' to allow her to explore histories of knowledge."

Introducing Dr JT Janse van Rensburg: New Optentia Participant

JT Janse van Rensburg is a senior lecturer in the School of Computer Science and Information Systems at the North-West University. She is passionate about finding creative ways to bridge the gap between IT higher education and IT practice. Project-based learning and reflective practice are central to her teaching philosophy. Her primary research focus is on design science research related projects - which include any novel and innovative artefacts in the software development domain.

JT is part of the Technology, Capability and Functioning programme in Optentia. She will bring her skills in Human Computer interaction and knowledge of the gap between the university experience and meaningful employment to the table.

Dr JT Janse van Rensburg

Soraya Harding: The New Research Administrator in Optentia

Soraya Harding has recently joined the Optentia team as a Research Administrator. She grew up in the small town of Richmond before moving to Uniondale where she finished school, after which she went on to study at Stellenbosch University. Soraya previously worked in the financial department of Mediclinic Southern Africa.

Soraya is already developing systems that will help the research entity to ensure efficient and effective research administration.

Soraya is married to Gareth, and they have two daughters, Elín aged 8, and Olivia, aged 5. They have been living in the Vaal for the last nine years, having moved up from the Cape. She enjoys cooking and spending time with her family and friends.

Mrs Soraya Harding

Two Researchers in (Labour) Economics Join Optentia

Two researchers with a background in Labour Economics joined Optentia from 1 April 2021.

Precious Mncayi is a lecturer in Economics at the North-West University (NWU) since August 2016. In 2020, she completed a PhD in Economics at the NWU. The title of her thesis was: "An analysis of underemployment amongst young people in South Africa: The case of university graduates." Precious is is passionate about quantitative analysis of socio-economic issues. She describes herself as energetic, persistent, self-motivated, dynamic and hardworking. Her expertise is in teaching, research ethics and quantitative analysis. Her research focus is strongly grounded in the broad field of economic development, with special interest in youth and graduate labour market dynamics, policy formulation and poverty-related studies. Precious has is author/co-author of various peer-reviewed publications. Click here to see her Google Scholar profile.

Dr Precrious Mncayi

Phindile Mdluli

Phindile Mdluli is currently employed as a Lecturer at NWU, Faculty of Economics Sciences. Since February 2018. She is registered for a PhD in Economics. She is interested in labour economics, economic development, and poverty studies. Click here to see her Google Scholar profile.

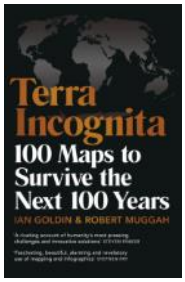
"Two Economics researchers in labour economics and poverty joined Optentia on 1 April 2021."

What You Need to Know …

Internationally the world faces various problems:

- Social tension because of worsening of the strain on the natural ecosystem, a rising discontent with capitalism and the resulting inequality.
- Rising economic nationalism. Nationalism, religion, and culture divide humans into hostile camps and make it challenging to collaborate.
- Technological growth of global data and digital technologies and inadequate consideration of human capabilities in dealing with these trends.
- The world faces an unprecedented international crisis in COVID-19.

Global processes of change have increasingly become the source of precarity for individuals and institutions. In developing countries and Africa, poverty, inequality, and unemployment present severe challenges to people and institutions. Any large-scale human achievement results from people (on a collective level) cooperating in flexible ways. To flourish, people need purpose and support. Although we live in a connected world, social well-being became an issue. Inequality, not because of income but because of technological disruptions, further complicates cooperation. Conflict will arise, not because people are exploited, but because they are (and feel) irrelevant for institutions and societies. Valuable sources about poverty, inequality and sustainable development exist. Click here to access the Sustainable Development Index. The website of "Our World in Data" is also a good source of information. Moreover, the book "Terra Incognita" by Ian Goldin and Robert Muggah provides valuable perspectives on these topics.

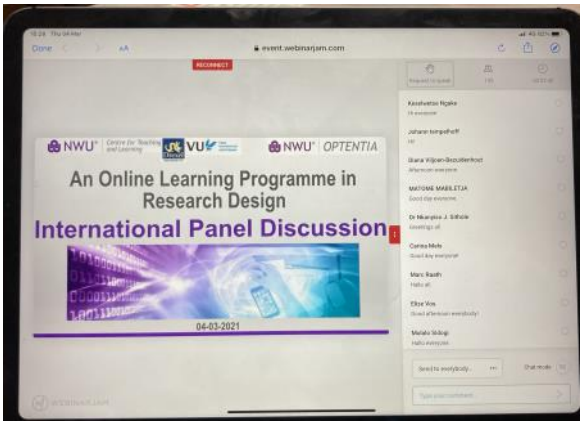


Webinar: Online SLP in Research Design

Covid-19 introduced a number of challenges to tertiary education, not the least of which is preparing postgraduate students to become confident researchers in their chosen field of study. This year the North-West University (NWU) introduces a new online short learning programme (SLP) in Research Design that will change the way researchers learn their craft.

The online SLP is not only relevant during lockdowns and pandemics, but it is also a significant improvement on the existing programme. The SLP provides learners with a crash course on research design that allows them to zoom in on specifics in their own time, while having the support and sounding board of a facilitator and fellow students. The SLP in Research Design utilises a learning ecosystem that is learner-centred and allows self-directed learning.

On 4 March 2021, the Department Marketing and Communication at the NWU organised a webinar to launch the Online SLP in Research Design. The webinar consisted of two parts:



- Part 1 focused on online learning of research methodology and included the following topics: a) Psychological well-being of postgraduate students (presented by Dr Laura Weiss, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). b) Mind, brain, and education: Implications for online learning (presented by Prof. Kristen Betts, Drexel University). c) Online assessment (presented by Dr Mariette Fourie, North-West University). d) Participation in an open science community (presented by Prof. Rens van de Schoot, Utrecht University).
- Part 2 focused on the content and methodology of the Online Short Learning Programme in Research Design that was developed by NWU and international researchers.

Click here to watch a video of the webinar. The slides of the webinar is available here. You can watch a video about the webinar here.

"The online SLP is not only relevant during lockdowns and pandemics, but it is also a significant improvement on the existing programme."

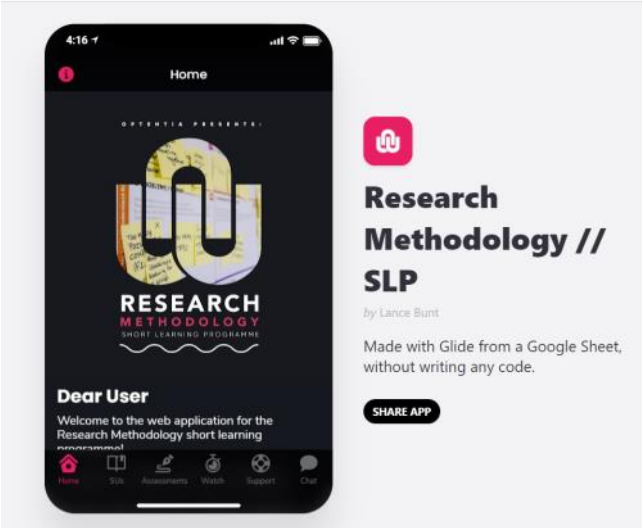
Online SLP in Research Design Starts on a High Note

During 2020 a group of North-West University academic and support staff members from various research entities collaborated to create an Online Short Learning Program (SLP) in Research Design for emerging researchers (including master's and PhD candidates). This unique product focuses on online learning (rather than just teaching) to build participants' research methodology capabilities.

While the challenges created by the COVID-19 lockdown indeed emphasised the need for flexibility in tertiary education teaching and learning, it also opened the door to make use of leading research to transfer a formerly face-to-face to an online SLP.

The Online SLP in Research Design is available on three platforms, namely Rise-Articulate, eFundi and Glide and can be accessed via a computer and mobile devices. The programme includes 10 study units.

- Study unit 1: Clarifying basic concepts of research, epistemology, philosophy of science and scientific paradigms.
- Study unit 2: Identifying research questions and developing research topics.
- Study unit 3: The research process at the NWU and psychological readiness to engage with master's and PhD studies.
- Study unit 4: Characteristics of good research and developing a research proposal.
- Study unit 5: Literature review and overview (including academic writing).
- Study unit 6: Qualitative research.
- Study unit 7: Quantitative research.



- Study unit 8: Mixed methods research.
- Study unit 9: Quantitative data analysis with JASP, Mplus, R/Rstudio, Excel and Eviews.
- Study unit 10: Publish research in a journal and communicating research impactfully.

Factors such as learners' struggles to adapt to online learning, technical issues with computers, a lack of computer literacy, a lack of self-motivation, and poor time management challenge learners and should be considered. Fatigue, threat, and stress inhibit learning. In contrast, challenge, personal relevance, choice and enablement promote learning. A collaborative approach that utilises educators, subject specialists and instructional designers is vital to create an environment that allows learners to meet learning outcomes.

You can watch a video about the development of the Online SLP in Research Design here. Click here to watch a video about the content of the Online SLP in Research Design as well as the methods used.

"The Online SLP in Research Design is available on three platforms."

Developing a Care Economy Strategy for Gauteng

As in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Gauteng's development agenda is centred on enhancing education and skills and decent work and business opportunities for its large population of young people and in particular for women. Present strategies for employment and enterprise creation emphasise an expansion of labour-intensive sectors, in particular agriculture, tourism, as well as the fostering of a knowledge-economy. Little, if any, consideration has thus far been given to a potential role of the care economy – and even less so the economy around long-term care (LTC) for older adults or people in need.

Yet, indications are that a well-developed LTC economy may not only foster possible improvements in the quality of assistance and support received by the growing number of older adults who require care, but – as a 2015 report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggests – may also be a key source of future job growth (another source being the green economy). Indeed, a body of emerging evidence and perspectives suggests that Gauteng's lack of focus on the LTC economy presents a major missed opportunity. Developing the LTC sector harbours the potential for job and enterprise creation, as well as for decisive progress in South Africa's quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to honour its commitments to continental frameworks on gender, ageing and rights.

As the economic powerhouse among South Africa's nine provinces and in keeping with its model status, Gauteng is ideally positioned to lead the exploration of and setting of agendas on LTC-economy related opportunities in (South) Africa.

Prof. Jaco Hoffman

To this end Gauteng Department of Economic Development partnered with Optentia / TRADE to develop an evidence-based strategy towards the development of a care economy in Gauteng. The core team is: Jaco Hoffman (NWU), Barbara Ziyane (GDED), Lowna Gie (NWU), Jongo Ganyile (GDED), Steve Dunga (NWU), Sune Ferreira-Schenk (NWU), Kgothatso Masinga (GDED).

"Little, if any, consideration has thus far been given to a potential role of the care economy."

Housing for Older Persons in Gauteng

The Gauteng Office of the Premier commissioned Optentia to provide evidence on Older Persons' housing needs across the Gauteng City Region (GCR). The desk top study will afford the Gauteng Provincial Government to gauge the extent of housing needs amongst Older Persons and devise options to address the housing/accommodation challenges facing Older Persons across the GCR. The desk top study is necessary to provide an understanding of the extent of the needs and possible options that could be employed to improve the lives of Older Persons.
The objectives are as follows:

- To determine the older population profile and extent of housing and accommodation needs amongst older people in the GCR
- To determine the current international, regional, national and provincial policy architecture on housing and livability that impact older people in the GCR
- To determine the housing and accommodation challenges older people in the GCR face, including identifying which policy issues that make access to housing and accommodation slow for older people in the GCR.
- To develop practical options that can be considered when addressing housing and accommodation needs for older people in the GCR

Prof. Jaco Hoffman as the project leader has a long-standing interest in housing issues for older persons and facilitated the establishment of the Mthimkhulu Centre and Housing Project for the Aged (Witbank Society for the Aged) in the province of Mpumalanga with a R30 000 000 grant from the SA Lottery. This housing scheme was the first of its kind in South Africa based on inclusive design principles.

Rural Communities for Ageing Well-being

The project (RuComm-4-AgeWell/ RuComm-para-Envej-Bien) is generally grounded in the SDG mission to leave no one behind. It is focused on low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America with an aim to address the UN Decade of Healthy Aging action to ensure that communities foster the capabilities of older people. More specifically it aims to generate a baseline understanding of rural contexts and well-being outcomes for older residents. The majority of older people live in LMICs. Within these regions and despite rural-urban migration processes, rural areas comprise vast geographical territories where a significant population of older people still lives. They face challenges associated with climate change, poverty, and lack of critical infrastructure. Furthermore, rural communities in developing countries are home to some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people. This project is an attempt to reduce the invisibility of older people in the global south. Global discourses are necessary for local solutions.

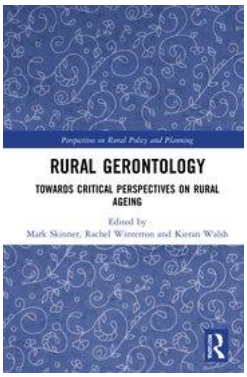
RuComm-4-AgeWell
Rural Communities for Ageing Wellbeing: Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa

The core team is: Nereide Curreri (Stirling University, UK), Jose Parodi (Universidad de San Martín de Porres, Lima, Peru), Jaco Hoffman (NWU), Norah Keating (University of Alberta / NWU), Andrew Banda (NWU / University of Zambia), and Anjonet Jordaan (NWU).

"... rural communities in developing countries are home to some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people."

News from the AGenDA Programme

Prof. Jaco Hoffman and Prof. Vera Roos contributed to a new book: "Rural Gerontology". This book provides the first foundation of knowledge about the intellectual traditions, contemporary scope and future prospects for the interdisciplinary field of rural gerontology. With a focus on rural regions, small towns and villages, which have the highest rates of population ageing worldwide, Rural Gerontology is aimed at understanding what it means for rural people, communities and institutions to be at the forefront of twenty-first-century demographic change. With a view to advancing a critical understanding of rural ageing populations, this book will have an overreaching impact across the social sciences by drawing on advancements in understandings of rural ageing from social, environmental, geographical and critical gerontology to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the diversity, complexity and implications of the ageing process in rural settings. This book provides the first synthesis of knowledge about rural gerontology, harnessing a burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship on the rural dimensions of ageing, old age and older populations. Bringing together valuable international perspectives, this book makes a timely contribution to gerontology, rural studies and the social sciences, and will appeal to scholars and researchers across USA and Canada, UK and Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, Europe, China and countries in Africa, South America and South-East Asia.



The 15th Global Conference on Ageing will take place from 9-12 November 2021. You can access the abstract submission guidelines here.

New PhD Student in Industrial Psychology

Rutger recently embarked on his PhD journey. Under the supervision of Prof. Leoni van der Vaart, he will be pursuing this degree in the field of Industrial/ Organisational Psychology. As a Human Resources Officer employed by Wits Health Consortium, he is passionate about the well-being of frontline healthcare workers. His master's degree (obtain from the North-West University in 2020) focused on the employment experiences of peer educators for sex workers. Building on this, his preliminary ideas for his PhD include the development of a questionnaire to assess needs crafting among healthcare workers as well as the development, implementation, and evaluation of a needs crafting intervention. The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic is undeniable disproportionately high for frontline workers and the mental health burden that they carry is described as a slow-motion disaster. Research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has created such circumstances that have thwarted the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By developing interventions that can reverse need thwarting, these healthcare workers' well-being may be enhanced with positive consequences for their willingness to serve society.

Rutger Kotze

"... the COVID 19 pandemic has created such circumstances that have thwarted the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness."

Two Staff Members Selected for PhD in Industrial Psychology

Two staff members of the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management, Kgomotso Malinga and Sibusiso Mnxuma have been selected for PhD study in Industrial Psychology. We wish these two colleagues well!

Sibusiso Mnxuma

Kgomotso Malinga

Henry Lewis: Optentia PhD Student from Jamaica

Henry Lewis was born in Guyana (South America) but moved to the island of Jamaica 22 years ago to pursue further studies in Psychology and Counselling. He is a man of many hats: a trained minister of religion, executive life coach, university lecturer, therapist, husband, and a father to his six-year-old son Joshua. Henry is a graduate of the Wesleyan Bible College in Guyana, Jamaica Theology Seminary and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology. Currently, he is a lecturer at the University of Technology, Jamaica, where he serves as head of an emerging Social Science Unit. Henry has worked as an adjunct lecturer for 10 years at the Mona School of Business and Management at the University of the West Indies, Mona. He has a deep interest in people's well-being. More specifically, his research interests are capabilities and optimal functioning of people in different work contexts in Jamaica.

Henry Lewis

Optentia's PhD Students: Making Us Proud

A total of 37 PhD students who have promoters at Optentia are currently registered. Click here to see the PhD students and their specific disciplines. PhD students in Optentia currently comes from different provinces in South Africa and even from different countries. International students come from Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe , the United Kingdom and Jamaica. PhD students experienced a range of challenges during them pandemic. However, most of the are making good progress.

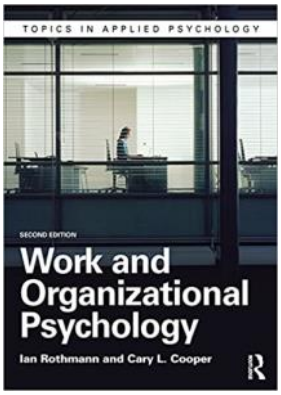
The word slide below summarises the PhD titles that are registered. Dominant words include; capabilities, functioning, South, Africa, African, well-being, flourishing, guidelines, social, employee, students, work, and education. The word slide confirms that PhD studies are in line with the mission of Optentia.

Optentia is proud of the diversity and qua--lity of PhD students in our entity!

"The books incorporate a range of features to bring psychology to life."

Third Edition of Book on Work and Organizational Psychology

Prof. Ian Rothmann and Prof. Cary Cooper are currently working on the third edition of their book on Work and Organizational Psychology. The book is part of a series of Topics in Applied Psychology, published by Routledge in the United Kingdom. The series includes seven books: Clinical Psychology, Counselling Psychology, Criminal Psychology, Health Psychology, Sport and Exercise Psychology, The books incorporate a range of features to bring psychology to life, including case histories, research methods, ethical debate, and learner activities. The series will provide readers with the tools they need to engage with, enjoy and understand the specific applied psychology discipline, ultimately ensuring confidence and success in exams as well as a comprehensive grounding in the profession. Click here for more information.



Jeanie Cave: PhD Student in Social Sciences

My name is Jeanie Cavé and I am a PhD in Social Science with Relational Dynamics and Development. I practice as a Clinical Psychologist in Fourways, and I have a passion for interactional and brain-based psychotherapies. As a newly registered PhD student, I am lucky to be supported by my supervisor, Prof Vera Roos and co-supervisor Dr Matthews Katjane. These first 2.5 months of 2021 have already stretched and challenged me in ways I couldn't have imagined, and I am still finding my researcher feet! March has been exciting as we have established my research question is: What constructs could be included in an interactional conceptual framework to describe relationships between individuals from different generations? My aim is to develop a conceptual framework that can be used for describing relationships for the purpose of more effective formulation of relational difficulties and thereby more efficient and meaningful development of intervention strategies. Currently, we are conducting a scoping review of the constructs of Person-Centred Approach and their application since 1951 as a point of departure for my exploration. Our aim is for this to be the first article of four for my completed PhD.

It is wonderful to feel rooted: Others believe in you and want to see you succeed - not only my colleagues and professors, but the whole team at NWU. I shared briefly on a zoom chat that I was unsure how to register, and Marinda Malan went above and beyond to ensure my registration took place and I was touched by her sincere care and support.

Jeanie Cave

For these reasons, I find myself unable to refer to "my" study only. Rather, it is "our" study and I am grateful for this to be my experience. After all, it indeed does take a village!

"For these reasons, I find myself unable to refer to 'my' study, only ..."

My Study Experiences *by* Jeanie Cave

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." As a clinical psychologist, I am used to being a team of one. When I am working, it is just me and my client. I am alone in my frame and hold space for my client single-handedly in that moment. When I completed my Master's degree, my supervisor allowed me to work very independently, and I, for the most part, walked that road alone. I always thought that I liked working alone, until I started my PhD at the NWU and discovered the magic of meaningful teamwork.

#DreamTeam came to be within the first two weeks of Optentia's SLP in Research Design. We were asked to indicate a phenomenon of interest and were then allocated into groups with others who indicated the same interest. I was fortunate to be allocated a group with three incredible people, Carol Dixon, Trust Mlambo and Femada Shamam. We formed an instant and easy connection and started affectionately referring to our group as #DreamTeam, a name that reflects the comradery, support, and power that working in a group has welcomed into the journey we are each walking. We have established a regular zoom get together, which we will maintain throughout our research journeys, beyond the SLP, where we share resources, debrief, support, encourage and assist one another. The connection is effortless, the result is profound.

I do not believe this group experience would have been possible without the context created by Optentia (Prof. Rothmann, Lynn Booysen and all the rest of the team) and our supervisors, Prof. Vera Roos, Prof. Jaco Hoffman and Dr Matthews Katjene. Their availability, encouragement, kindness and support has not only been a corrective academic experience for me, but has created a culture where we are all on the same side with a common goal: to produce high quality research and have fun while doing it. They have created a context where there is no competitiveness, only compassion, and this has manifested into our very special team.

They Say .... *by* Carol-Ann Dixon

They say ....
They say you should do a PhD
They say it's important to make a contribution to society
They say as you get older you get wiser
They say it's never too late to study
They say it's a process
They say it's a journey
They say it's so rewarding when you find that golden nugget
They say .....

I say ...
What have I done?
What was I thinking?
This seems too overwhelming
Where do I start?
What's the difference between qualitative and quantitative again?
Realism and constructivism?
I should know this!
And now there is critical realism - what on earth is that?
I thought a spider was an insect, and spice was for food!
How will I ever remember the difference between APA and Harvard?
Et al or et al or et al.?
Where does the comma go, and the ampersand what what?

I say ...
Breathe, and breathe again
You have "all the time in the world"
You have amazing support, you are not alone
Look, already some things are making sense
You are already discovering so many wonderful new ideas
You can now call them constructs and heuristics
I say ...
Good enough for now, safe enough to try
Watch this space!!!

Carol-Ann Dixon

"You can now call them constructs and heuristics."

My PhD Experiences *by* Thato Sultan

My PhD journey started years before I registered. Due to work, personal commitments, I have had to put it off until I got to a point where "life was less stressful". I soon realized that point may never come so I made a calculated decision to pursue my PhD, whilst ensuring that I have a strong support structure to help me cope and get through the process.

My research interests focus primarily on intergenerational relationships and promoting belonging and connectedness within communities. My original intention was over-ambitious, with the support of my supervisors, Prof. Vera Roos and Dr. Matthews Katjene, who assisted in narrowing down my research topic, I was able to streamline my topic into a manageable research topic. The support received from the faculty in terms of research methodology and other research related programmes such as the SLP made my journey a lot more smooth because the programme gave me a better understanding of how to engage in academic research and what skills I need to develop.

Thato Sultan

Does Urban Green Add to Happiness? A Research Synthesis

There is a high demand for the greening of urban areas and one of the drivers of this demand is the biophilia theory which holds that we feel better in a green environment. Greening urban environments involves considerable costs, so the question arises whether urban greenery really adds to the happiness of city dwellers. If so, by how much and whether the effect differ across people and situations.

We summarised the available research findings on the relation between happiness and urban greenery considering both outdoor and indoor green spaces. We drew on the Word Database of Happiness, in which we found 38 research findings on the relationship between happiness and urban greenery, reported in 13 publications. These findings are presented in two tabular schemes that include links to further online details.

The provision of urban greenery tends to go together with greater happiness of locals, both outdoor and indoor greenery. The size of the effect is small. We found some support for the mechanism proposed by biophilia theory. However, the statistical association is driven by more factors, e.g. where fear of crime reduces the effect of outdoor greenery on happiness.

Prof. Ruut Veenhoven

A first draft of this study is available here.

Ruut Veenhoven, Nivré Claire Wagner and Jan Ott

"The provision of urban greenery tends to go together with greater happiness of locals."

From Global Crisis to a Better World

Prof. Ian Goldin recently presented a webinar with the title "The Covid-19 Pandemic: From Global Crisis to a Better World". According to Prof. Goldin, a hyper-connected world is vulnerable to global emergencies. He suggested that we need to seize this moment: the pandemic has been the worst thing in most of our lives, in our economies, and globally. It is also the most significant setback for the achievement of poverty reduction, for creating sustainable jobs, and in health. Prof. Goldin said that the pandemic provides the opportunity to create a better world. If we can respond constructively to this opportunity, all the suffering will not be in vain.

Prof. Goldin warned that we should not think of the pandemic in terms of words such as "reset" and "bouncing back". A reset implies that you get back to where you were before an event happened (similarly to resetting a computer that has crashed). Moreover, bouncing back means that you are on the same tracks and going the same way. Prof. Goldin said that we need to change direction fast. Unless we do, we are not going to deal with fundamental problems.

Click here to read more about the insights brought by Prof. Goldin. You can watch a video of his talk here.

Prof. Ian Goldin, an expert on globalisation

Embracing Interesting Times *by* Anjonet Jordaan

It has been a year since COVID-19 radically changed what business-as-usual means to us. While the past 12 months have certainly challenged us, and continue to challenge us all on many levels, it did have what I consider a very beneficial side-effect.

With our circumstances forcing us to reconsider how we get things done, from the simple and mundane to complex endeavours, the Optentia family has stepped up to challenge too. Here at Optentia, we are always keen to help those around us succeed.

During this time we have continued to thrive, whether it be an individual research project or our collective effort to create a short learning programme in a format we've never attempted to work in before. Asking for help, stepping up and working together we continue to contribute our best effort.

"May you live in interesting times" is said to be a Chinese curse. It is meant to be ironic. It seems like a wish for good fortune, but the reasoning is actually that the uninteresting times are better since they are peaceful and tranquil.

It may originally have been meant to be ironic, but I think we should embrace the "interesting times" created by world events. While they push us out of the comfort zones we developed during "uninteresting times", they also force us to be creative and strip us of excuses we can otherwise afford and rise to the challenge and opportunity that's been created.

"It may originally have been meant to be ironic, but I think we should embrace the 'interesting times' created by world events."

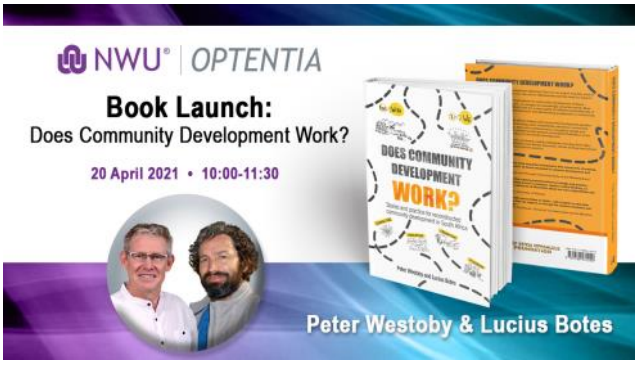
Launch of a New Book on Community Development

Optentia will be hosting a virtual launch of a book Does Community Development Work? – co-written by Prof Lucius Botes – on 20 April from 10:00 to 11:30.

Prof Botes, a professor in development studies and the director for research development in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, wrote the book along with Prof Peter Westoby, an associate professor in social science and community development at the School of Public Health and Social Work at the Queensland University of Technology.

Does Community Development Work? uses South African history and community development practice, dealing with issues such as housing, land, cooperatives, education, community protests and urban farming. It combines stories,, conceptual insight and theoretical discourse, illustrating the global and South African history of community development.

Click here to read more about the book and to register for the event.



News: Technology and Capability

Japie Greeff, leader of the programme "Technology, Capability and Functioning" in Optentia has been working with the Department of Basic Education to create a curriculum for coding and robotics for learners in Grade R to Grade 9. According to Japie, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi) recently informed him that the curriculum they have submitted has been approved and will soon be published in a Government Gazette. His team now moves on to the next step: teacher training. There will be two processes running simultaneously. First, teachers will participate in five days of training, informing them of what they need to do. Second, blended learning will be used to train teachers in the four streams of education: school context, research and trends, educational approach and curriculum content. During the training planning, Japie met one of his heroes, Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala, Vice-Chanellor of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) to discuss collaboration with the UJ Technolab. Japie has secured his first postgraduate student in this area who will start her Master's study in 2021, focusing on Fourth/Fifth Industrial Revolution and how to align them vertically through the educational chain.

Japie Greeff and Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala

"Prof Van Greunen is passionate about using technology as an enabler in society."

New Extraordinary Professor: Prof. Darelle van Greunen

A memorandum of understanding has been signed between NWU and NMU with regards to the continued development of the Yabelana ICT ecosystem which has been rolled out to a number of communities across South Africa. It is hoped that this agreement will help researchers in Optentia and at the NMU to expand the footprint of the system in South Africa, while also bringing with it a multitude of opportunities for scientific collaboration by expanding the reach and functionality of the ecosystem.

Prof. Darelle Van Greunen from the NMU has joined as an extraordinary professor in Optentia in the Technology, Capability and Functioning programme. Prof Van Greunen is passionate about using technology as an enabler in society, and using ICT as a catalyst for innovation. Prof. van Greunen is currently Director, Centre for Community Technologies and Professor in Information Technology at the Nelson Mandela University and fit the description of the expert we need in the programme. The NWU and NMU has already launched a joint project (the We Deliver project) in which an application was developed to improve service delivery to older people in South Africa. Prof. Darelle van Greunen plays a critical role in the project in supporting Prof. Vera Roos (Optentia) and Japie Greeff (Optentia and Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences). Prof. van Greunen is an NRF-rated researcher with a good research record and more than 800 citations.

Prof. Darelle van Greunen

The Idealisation of Spornosexuality among South African Men

Recent South African inquiry into masculinity provides dualistic representations of men and masculinity. Some studies exemplify the tenets of patriarchal, toxic and violent masculinity (i.e. the facilitators of the current second pandemic of gender-based violence). Conversely, other researchers implore us to consider the inherently diverse and negotiable co-construction of masculinities in South Africa and abroad (akin to the work on inclusive and hybrid masculinities).

To explore this incongruence, I am currently researching the potential intersection of 'spornosexuality' and 'inclusive masculinity theory' among men who engage in gym-work. Informed by the principles symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, I wish to explore how their subjectivity, relational and reflexive interactions, whether intrapsychic and/or interpersonal, may result in a hybridisation of supposedly rigid and transgressive masculine typologies. Mark Simpson (2016) defines spornosexuality as the "second-generation…sexed-up, body-centred, 'hard-core'" metrosexual, i.e. men who assign a greater deal of importance to their physical appearance and showing off their buff physiques on, among others, social media. These men seek to obtain this muscular ideal through, among others, mirroring the appearances of sports (e.g. Christiano Ronaldo) and pornographic stars to reaffirm and perform their masculinity.

Whereas the former may recall the features of traditional (or orthodox masculinity), proponents of inclusive masculinities emphasise the redemptive possibilities of homosociality (i.e. examples of and need for emotional and physical tactility among men) and a decline in homohysteria (i.e. fear of being perceived as 'gay' by others). Anglo-American (e.g. Eric Anderson and Mark McCormack) and South African scholars (e.g. Robert Morrell and colleagues) advocate for providing a more nuanced and context-specific investigation into unique life-worlds of men. No South African inquiry has been undertaken on how the gym could serve as distinct facilitator of the construction and/or deconstruction and negotiation and/or renegotiation of what is means for men (regardless of their sexual orientation) to be masculine and sexual beings.

Prof. Jacques Rothmann

The objective of the present study therefore centres on an exploration of the lived experiences of self-identified heterosexual and gay men in South Africa who engage in bodybuilding, resistance training, and/or power-lifting. The findings, informed by conducting semi-structured interviews, will contribute to a monograph commissioned by Palgrave MacMillan for publication in late 2022.

"Recent South African inquiry into masculinity provides dualistic representations of men and masculinity."

The GOHWP *by* Prof. Marieta du Plessis

I was privileged to be elected as an Executive Board member of the Global Organisation for Humanitarian Work Psychology (GOHWP) for 2021-2022. It is an opportunity to work with individuals from across the globe on issues such as decent work, humanitarian workplace practices, etc. GOHWP has a number of projects at the moment, one being research into police brutality, whilst another project aims to generate educational resources for the teaching of HWP. These speak to the goals of GOHWP, namely: (1) To develop, promote, and support the field of humanitarian work psychology and its participants, (2) To promote GOHWP values in the disciplines, organisations and societies with which we engage – prominently including the discipline of psychology, the sub-discipline of organisational psychology, and actors involved in enhancing human welfare, and (3) To promote and engage in humanitarian activities as organisational psychologists, including contributing to poverty reduction and to the empowerment of marginalised groups. During April, we will be having the first GOHWP Engage! session as part of the 2021 series. Please connect on social media for more information. You can also sign up as member of GOHWP free of charge, to be included in further communication.

Prof. Marieta du Plessis

Mission and Strategy of Optentia

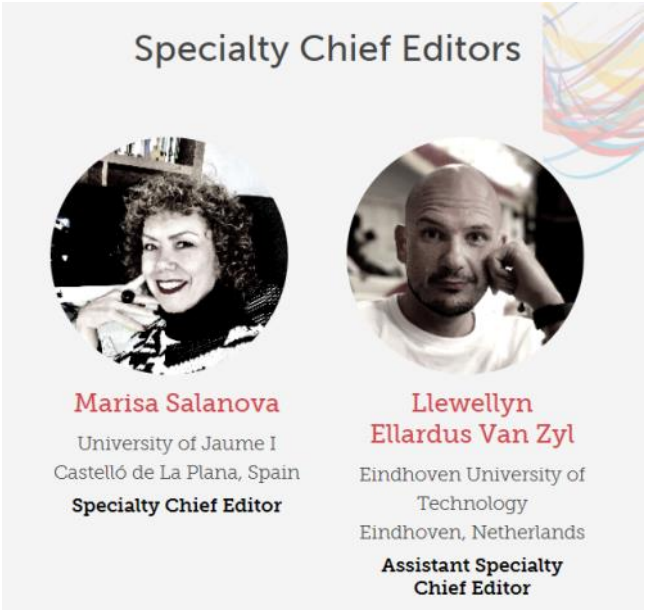
The Optentia Research Focus Area's has applied to be upgraded to a research unit. We hope to receive the result of this application by the end of April 2021. Optentia's mission is to develop and organise knowledge for the optimal expression of individual, social, and institutional potential. The most compelling aspirations of Optentia are to:

- Facilitate and support multi-disciplinary collaborative research projects aimed at quality value-to-society research outputs (peer-reviewed publications, knowledge used for sustainable development) across faculties, nationally as well as internationally, and aligned with the mission of the NWU.
- Develop the capabilities of emerging researchers, master's and PhD students (based on principles of equity and social justice), and also established researchers, and implement strategies to retain a core group of successful, effective, and flourishing established researchers.
- Deliver quality master's and PhD programmes and research.
- Ensure proper funding for research projects through national and international partnerships by further developing a support system for funding applications and by managing projects effectively.
- Develop and maintain technology-supported teaching and learning (master's and PhD programmes and SLPs), research, and community engagement interventions.
- Internationalise with African and South African relevance and application.
- Market and disseminate knowledge gained from research.
- Obtain and use resources, structures, and technology optimally and strategically.
- Refine a system for quality control and dissemination of knowledge and manage information about research-related activities

"Optentia has applied to be upgraded to a research unit."

Launching Frontiers in Psychology: Positive Psychology

On 4 March 2021, Frontiers in Psychology launched a new section in the journal dedicated to Positive Psychology. Under Prof. Marisa Salanova and Prof. Llewellyn van Zyl's leadership, this section aims to provide an interdisciplinary platform for disseminating cutting-edge scientific research on the science and practice of positive psychology. A number of Optentia Personnel were also appointed as Associate Editors to help drive the journal's strategic direction. Prof. Ian Rothmann, Prof. Saskia Kelders, Prof. Sufen Chen, Prof. Hans Henrik Knoop, and Prof. Mirna Nel are just some of the most prominent members of Optentia that are involved.



Frontiers in Psychology: Positive Psychology aims to collate theoretical-, basic- and empirical research across different disciplines that are rooted in and advance the tenets of positive psychology. It accepts topics that include, but are not limited to, the antecedents, outcomes, utility, measurement, and development of:

- Character Strengths, Virtues and Capability.
- Positive Mental Health, Well-being and Optimal Functioning.
- Positive Organisations and Thriving Institutions.
- Flourishing Communities and Societies.
- Positive states (e.g. pleasure), Positive Traits (e.g. grit), and Positive Behaviors.
- Positive Psychological Interventions (e.g. Strengths-Based PPIs).
- Positive Ethics, and Open Science Practices in Positive Psychology.

Contributions where positive psychological approaches and principles are applied to other domains, or those adopting an integrative perspective, are especially welcomed. Further, this section also invites replication studies and those that show negative- or unexpected results.

Over the first year, our Associate Editors will host several Special Issues to help launch the section. Submissions to these special issues and the journal are now open.

Optentia is excited to embark upon this new journey with you and hopes to build out positive psychology's science and practice in the years to come. For more information about the journal, please check out our ABOUT PAGE

"Over the first year, our Associate Editors will host several Special Issues."

Future Perspectives on Positive Psychology

Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) is calling for papers on "Future Directions on Positive Psychology: A Research Agenda". This special issue is hosted by Marisa Salanova and Llewellyn van Zyl, and calls for collation of a series of research agendas that can drive the future direction of positive psychology.

According to the Editors, Martin Seligman's inaugural lecture (1998) as the president of the APA marked the dawn of Positive Psychology. Seligman called for a science of positive subjective experiences, positive individual states/traits/behaviours, and positive societal factors that improves the quality of life and well-being. Since then, this sub-discipline of psychology has shown extraordinary and inspiring growth in both academy (e.g. research papers/books) and practice (e.g. establishment of professional associations, and annual conferences). Positive psychology has increased our collective understanding of the factors that make life worth living, the drivers that enhance well-being and the elements that undermine them. It has given birth to many new theories, research models and methodologies that aim to measure, interpret, model and optimise the conditions that lead to flourishing individuals and thriving societies. It has also spawned a magnitude of sub-disciplines ranging from positive ageing, positive coaching, well-being therapies, positive relationships, positive health, positive organisational psychology etc. Despite building out its own identity, positive psychology has also been adopted in many adjacent fields like organisational studies, education, health, risk management, and even architectural sciences.

"Positive psychology has increased our collective understanding of the factors that make life worth living."

Positive psychology has provided new insights into the human condition and innovative means to solve complex individual, organisational and societal problems. Positive psychology has brought balance to psychology by establishing a platform to focus on more than just "fixing what is wrong" through focusing on optimizing what already works well. As a collective, we believe that positive psychology can continue to play a vital role in the future by deepening our understanding of 'positivity' and developing practical tools, methodologies, and interventions to enhance people, organisations, and societies' functioning.

But what does the future of positive psychology hold? What are the strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results of positive psychology? And how can we, as a collective, build out the credibility and impact of the discipline's future? For us, these are some of the most challenging goals of positive psychology.

This Research Topic addresses such by collating a series of research agendas about the future of positive psychology in different speciality areas. Specifically, the aim is to identify the limitations in our current understanding of the different theories, models, methods and interventions on which positive psychology is built and propose a roadmap for addressing such in the future. This would aid in setting a specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound research agenda to direct the future development of positive psychology. Contributions are welcome when discussing the current state of theory and research as it pertains to each specific topic, showing empirical data from research and should be presented in the format for a research agenda. We also welcome conceptual papers that provide insights into how the field could develop. We intend that these contributions will be 'visionary, inspiring and provocative' to stimulate and guide new research and positive psychology practice. As such, this Research Topic calls for research agendas on:

- New theoretical, methodological and practical approaches that could drive the development of the discipline.
- Multiculturality and inclusive perspectives that extends positive psychology to groups that have been ignored or marginalised.
- New independent predictors of well-being, happiness and flourishing, as well as contextual factors that could lead to flourishing individuals, positive organisations and thriving communities and societies.
- Describing new technological innovations that could drive positive psychological assessments and interventions
- Alternative metrics for economic prosperity (e.g. Gross-Domestic Happiness).
- Fully integrative, 'holistic' or alternative approaches on well-being.
- Frameworks for positive psychological and societal interventions aimed at prosperity.
- Integrating positive psychology in emerging domains such as Positive Artificial Intelligence, and Human-Robot Collaboration.
- Emerging topics within positive psychology emanating from positive education, positive health, counselling and coaching, positive organisations and institutions, positive clinical psychology, post-traumatic growth and resilience, positive parenting, and societies.

We invite potential authors to submit a 300 Word Abstract of their proposed contributions via the Frontiers System before or on 30 May 2021. The final manuscripts will be due on 30 August 2021 and will be subjected to the normal blind collaborative review process as Frontiers. For more information about the call and how to submit, click here.

Call for Papers: Special issue on Positive Psychological Assessments

Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) is calling for papers on "Positive Psychological Assessments: Modern approaches, methodologies, models and guidelines". This special issue is hosted by Llewellyn van Zyl, Leon De Beer, Marielle Zondervan-Zwijenburg, Peter ten Klooster, Maria Vera, and Arianna Constantini.

These special guest editors argue that the use of positive psychological assessment measures (PPAMs) has seen a rapid rise during the last decade. This rise is partially fuelled by the popularity of the 'positive approach towards mental health' in practice and the worldwide expansion of well-being research within the discipline. On the one hand, an ever-increasing amount of practitioners employ PPAMs to assess the positive states, traits, and behaviours that could lead their clients to the good life and track their interventions' effectiveness. On the other, researchers are continually expanding our understanding of well-being through the development/conceptualization of new positive psychological constructs.

Despite these calls, recent criticisms of positive psychology have highlighted the fallibility of PPAMs; which directly affects the credibility of the discipline and its underlying theories. Several studies have shown that various PPAMs produce inconsistent factorial structures, varying levels of internal consistency and significant differences in their predictive capacity between cultures. Further, popular PPAMs have also been shown to be culturally biased, and very few instruments are grounded in local traditions. The widespread practice of merely (back) translating PPAMs developed in the West into local languages in the East or Africa, without thorough contextualization, has also drawn much criticism. In addition, questions have also been posed not just *if* PPAMs are valid for a particular population but also whether the instrument can validly be used *for* a particular purpose. For example, the VIA Strengths Inventory is a valid measure to assess strengths but is it a valid measure that can be used for recruitment and selection purposes. Finally, it is unclear to what degree low scores on negative psychological states, traits and behaviours (e.g., on depression, inattentiveness) can be used to assess positive psychological states, traits and behaviours.

Therefore, there is a need for more innovative and robust approaches towards the development, validation, evaluation, and use of PPAMs to enhance the discipline's credibility. Newly developed, (back) translated, and popular PPAMs also need to provide extensive evidence of their validity, reliability and construct equivalence. Further, given the methodological advancements in psychometric evaluation and statistical modelling (e.g. developments in ESEM, Bayesian approaches to confirmatory factor analysis and measurement invariance, item response theory models, etc), best practice guidelines on the estimation and reporting PPAMs are needed to enhance researchers' competence and robustness of applied psychometrics. Further, given the rapid rise of new PPAMs being developed to measure similar positive psychological constructs, it is difficult for both researchers and practitioners to decide upon the most appropriate instrument for their needs. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the criterion validity of new versus established measures and conduct systematic reviews of the psychometric properties of existing measures to better enable the field to choose PPAMs that are fit-for-purpose.

The purpose of this special issue/research topic is to curate modern approaches/tools, methodologies, models and estimation/evaluation guidelines for PPAMs. In particular, we invite manuscripts that reports on:

- The development and validation of new or adapted psychometric instruments that aim to measure positive states (e.g. happiness), traits (e.g. strengths) and behaviours (e.g. life crafting).
- The psychometric properties, validity/reliability and construct equivalence of existing PPAMs.
- Measurement invariance of positive psychological constructs over time and between groups (e.g. gender, culture, and socioeconomic status).
- Cultural differences in the operationalisation of positive psychological constructs.
- Computer adaptive PPAMs and non-invasive assessment approaches.
- The development and validation of Qualitative PPAMs such (e.g. strengths-based interviewing, visual voice analyses and photo-ethnography).
- Innovative and novel approaches to the assessment of positive states/traits/behaviours (e.g. strengths spotting).
- Best practice guidelines and "How To" guides for the estimation and reporting advanced psychometric methods (such as Bayesian CFAs, Measurement Invariance);
- Systematic literature reviews on the factorial structures, validity and internal consistency of existing PPAMs;
- The dimensionality of the 'negative' and positive psychological concepts.

We invite potential authors to submit a 300-word abstract of their proposed contributions via the Frontiers System before or on 30 April 2021. The final manuscripts will be due on 25 August 2021 and will be subjected to the normal blind collaborative review process as Frontiers. For more information about the call and how to submit, click here.

"... recent criticisms of positive psychology have highlighted the fallibility of positive psychological assessment measures."

Positive Psychological Interventions beyond WEIRD Contexts

Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) is calling for papers on Positive Psychological Interventions beyond WEIRD contexts. This special issue is hosted by Llewellyn van Zyl, Marijke Schotanus-Dijkstra, Susana Llorens, Jeff Klibert, Machteld van den Heuvel and Claude-Hélène Mayer.

Positive psychological interventions (PPIs) are criticized for being a Western-, Educated-, Industrialized-, Rich- and Democratic- (WEIRD) enterprise. The term 'WEIRD enterprise' reflects the idiosyncratic nature of the populations on which the science and practice of positive psychology is built; and the extent towards which such is then generalised to the entire human population. Traditionally, PPIs are built on the experiences of white, privileged, wealthy and highly educated individuals that reside in western/first world countries (Hendriks et al., 2019). This approach neglects the under-privileged, under-represented, and vulnerable groups' experiences and ignores the cultural embeddedness/origins of the positive states, traits, and behaviours that PPIs aim to improve. Yet, PPI designs, -content, and methodologies are presented to be universally relevant and useful. Recent bibliographic analyses showed that despite more than 8000 published randomised control trials on PPIs, only 187 were from non-WEIRD contexts. Further, when attempts are made to replicate prominent PPIs in non-WEIRD contexts, they tend to show mixed or non-significant results. This raises the question: Do PPIs really 'work' for those it argues it's designed for?

This question roughly translates into a need for understanding "If", "When", "How", and "Why" do PPIs work in non-WEIRD contexts. We, therefore, call for papers that aim to present theoretical- or empirical-based answers to these pressing questions. We aim to synthesize cutting-edge knowledge on enhancing the effectiveness of PPI designs, content, dissemination and evaluation methods within non-WEIRD contexts. We welcome original research, brief reports, systematic literature reviews, meta-analyses, guidelines and case studies centred around:

- IF PPIs Work in non-WEIRD contexts. This implies investigating the effectiveness of traditional PPIs in vulnerable populations or within cross-cultural or multicultural contexts. Further, providing theoretical perspectives that supports or critically evaluates the theories, methods, concepts and constructs underpinning traditional PPIs. Finally, we seek papers that develop and evaluate culturally sensitive PPIs within non-WEIRD clinical, educational, organisational, community and societal contexts.
- WHEN do PPIs work in non-WEIRD contexts. Here the focus is on knowing when PPIs work and don't work. A critical reflection on the methods, intervention content, and cultural contexts are required to understand the conditions under which PPIs can yield positive results. What is required to develop, design, implement, and evaluate PPIs to ensure sustainable results within non-WEIRD contexts?
- HOW do PPIs work in non-WEIRD contexts. This implies a need to understand the methodological factors and conditions required to ensure that PPIs yield desired results and under which conditions it does not. Further, we have to understand how PPIs affect changes in positive states/traits and behaviours and not just "if" it leads to positive outcomes. Guidelines for enhancing positive states (e.g. life satisfaction; work engagement), -traits (e.g. strengths), -cognitions (e.g. hope; optimism) and -behaviours (e.g. pro-active and pro-social behaviours) of individuals from non-WEIRD contexts are also encouraged. We also seek to understand how to design online interventions that are engaging, culturally sensitive and ensure sustainable results.
- WHY do PPIs work/not-work in non-WEIRD context. Here, we seek to understand why and for whom PPIs tend to fail or produce mixed results outside of WEIRD contexts. What are the content-related, methodological factors or evaluation methods that practitioners/researchers need to consider when designing PPIs for non-traditional contexts?

To be considered for this research topic in Frontiers, we invite potential authors to submit a 300 Word Abstract of their proposed contributions via the Frontiers System before or on 31 May 2021. The final manuscripts will be due on 30 August 2021 and will be subjected to the normal blind collaborative review process as Frontiers. You are welcome to submit your manuscripts earlier; we will manage them on a rolling publication basis.

For more information about the call and how to submit, click here.

"Positive psychological interventions are criticized for being a Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) enterprise."

Publication of a New Book: we-DELIVER Project

The we-DELIVER intergenerational community-based project to develop an ICT ecosystem to promote holistic service delivery to older persons has come full circle with the publication of a book, now in preparation for Springer Nature by June. Edited by Vera Roos and Jaco Hoffman, the work is entitled Age-Inclusive ICT Innovation for Service Delivery: A developing country perspective. It presents the first systematic co-created process to develop and implement an age-inclusive information communication technological solution to enable communities to access the help and services they need. More broadly, the book offers tools to assist with the design of such solutions in developing countries.

First intercampus and interdisciplinary meeting on 26 May 2017 Back from left: Mianda Erasmus, Tsitso Monaheng, Juan Steyn, Hendri Coetzee, Osden Jokonya, Vera Roos, Adi Eyal, Karabo Mhele, Gerda van Dijk, Anél du Plessis, Estiann Steyn, Jamie-Lee Dormehl, Anelda van der Walt. Front from left: Mariaan van Aswegen, Fido Maforah, Zine Sapula, Shingairai Chigeza

For the community-based project - launched to provide a baseline for the technology, researchers from different subject disciplines (law, demography and population studies, sociology, information systems, psychology, social work, development studies, public administration) - developed data-collection tools, and collected data on the cell phone use of a specific cohort of older South Africans in diverse contexts. This led to the creation of an age-inclusive ICT system, Yabelana (alluding to sharing of information), which accommodates smart and older generation cell phone technology.

The transdisciplinary book project required researchers to cross their unidisciplinary boundaries of law, sociology, psychology, social work, and computer science to develop a shared frame of reference aimed at generating new knowledge. The rich multidimensional scientific contexts enabled researchers to identify disciplinary blind spots; challenge discipline-specific boundaries; and appreciate the contributions of a both-and-approach. Transdisciplinary collaboration was enabled by creating a clear context when interacting with researchers from different disciplines to ensure that everyone is on the same page; collectively developing conceptual boundaries by drawing on diverse disciplinary assumptions, theoretical frameworks and applications; and moving flexibly within and beyond disciplinary perspectives – being curious about other perspectives and crossing the bridge to the 'other' side.

"Transdisciplinary collaboration was enabled by creating a clear context ..."

A Time to Go ...

A number of researchers have joined other research entities from January 2021. Prof. Ansie Fouche, Prof. Hayley Walker-Williams, Dr Elmien Truter, Baquira Ebrahim and Shanae Theunissen have joined COMPRESS. Furthermore, Prof. Zandri Dickason, Dr Sune Ferreira, Johnny Jansen van Rensburg, and Danny Mokatsanyane have joined TRADE.

We wish these colleagues well in their future research!

Critical Realism: A Social Justice Stance *by* Dr M. Fourie

This is a critical exchange in which my personal, professional, and intellectual positionalities are posed as reflective statements in recognising and problematising the intersectional notions of social justice as a conceptual praxis of analysis for my research context in becoming a critical realist in the higher education (HE) context. Who I am and what I have experienced influences how I see the world, which affects my choices, decisions, and actions. My sentiment expressed is explained by what Malterud (2001:483-484) postulates: "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions."

"... justice refers to fairness in the way that people are treated."

According to the Collins dictionary, justice refers to fairness in the way that people are treated, and social justice to the principle that all members of society have equal rights and opportunities. Bell (1997) postulates that "social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure". As an academic developer, scholar and researcher, seeking social justice in HE, I will start by adopting a reflexive approach, with reference to the assertion of Cohen and Crabtree below, in recognising and reflecting on social justice issues whilst examining my own identity in relation to how I am operating within normative hegemonic structures in HE. "Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Personal characteristics that define my social position

I am an Afrikaans, white, middle class cisgender female who grew up in a South African colonial context evident of systemic racism, and spent my entire school (Grade R – 12) career in the apartheids era. My rudimentary upbringing in a typical white family and community, reflects the advantages of certain, and to some extent limited colonial privileges in terms of social class, schooling, and opportunities not adequately and fairly distributed to the wider South African population. From a humanistic point of view, I am a citizen of this country, that testify of the lived experiences ranging from coloniality to decoloniality for the past 44 years.

I regard myself as a teacher, activist, scholar, life-long learner, researcher and academic developer who strongly advocates for social justice in the broader social context, and specifically in HE in which I find myself. In appreciation for my racial open-mindedness, fairness, and assertiveness towards social justice for all, I can confidently progress from being a person to becoming a voice. Recognising and acknowledging the professional lens through which I approach social justice, will establish my academic and scholar identity as part of this self-awareness journey. My historical background and how I situate

myself within the HE context, equips me with the necessary attributes to thoughtfully interrogate the dominant discourses and social mechanisms evident in HE with reference to Archer's concepts of structures, culture, and agency prevalent in the HE context, and specifically at North-West University.

In my journey to unravel the complexity of HE in pursuit of its real purpose, it is evident that research in education is increasingly being located in the frameworks of critical and social realism. As HE institutions are regarded as the providers of knowledge, critical realism proposes that reality exists independent of our knowledge of it (Westaway et al., 2019). The Critical Realist approach is concerned with exploring the causal links between that which is observed and experienced, with this hidden or unobservable reality (Case, 2013). Social realism draws on the critical realist concepts of depth ontology, which attempts to understand the base conditions or underlying mechanisms of a phenomenon (ibid). This section explains critical and social realism and position them in relation to the HE context (see page 23).

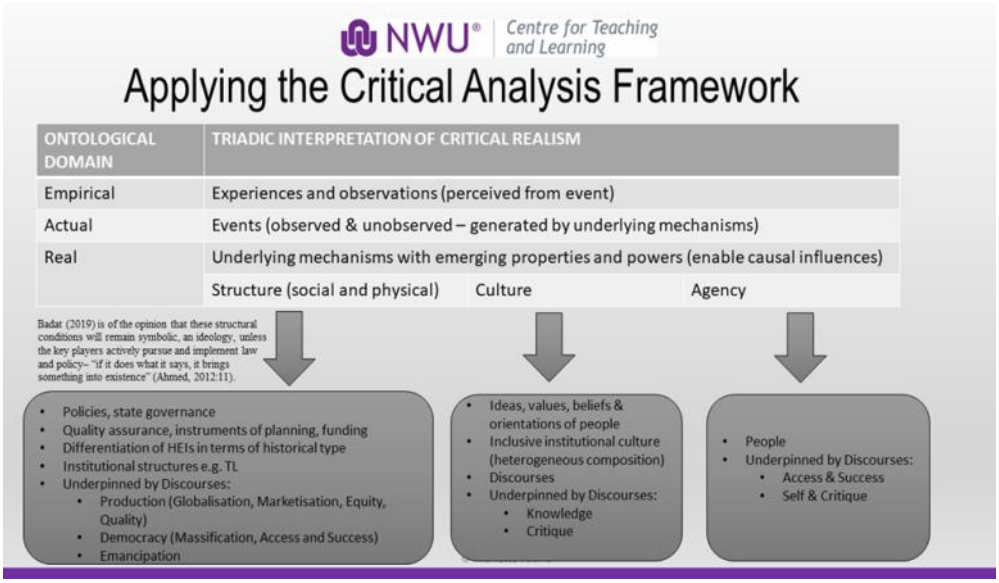
Critical Realism: A Social Justice Stance *by* Dr M. Fourie

Critical Realism (CR) refers to a philosophy of ontology, a metatheory of a philosophy of reality which distinguishes between the real world and the observable world. Reality exists out there and we are all involved in the process of knowing which modulates what is known. Bhaskar is looking at the social location of knowledge and states that ontology determines epistemology – the way things are affects the way in which we can know them, and the extent to which they can be known. Critical realism is used to analyse systemic challenges with reference to epistemology (epistemic taxonomies). This section elaborates on what Bhaskar means by critical realism and how we should think of multiple levels of reality. This implies that there is a reality that exist which is stratified into three domains: real, actual, and empirical. As Haigh et al (2019) explains: "The real domain consists of entities or structures which have properties that give them the power to activate mechanisms that can affect other structures (i.e. causal mechanisms); the actual domain consists of events and their effects that have been caused by the activation of causal mechanisms; and the empirical domain represents actual events-effects that can be, or have been, observed or experienced".

In explaining Critical Realism (CR), as an underpinning philosophical paradigm for conducting social science research, it opens up novel opportunities to investigate complex phenomena such as social justice in HE in a holistic manner. Under CR, a causal explanation for a given phenomenon is inferred by explicitly identifying the means by which structural mechanisms and contextual conditions interact to generate a given set of events. CR acknowledges the role of subjective knowledge of agents in a given situation, as well as the existence of independent structures that constrain and enable these agents to pursue certain actions in a particular setting. CR-based research focuses on answering the question of what the components and interactions within a reality must be like in order to explain the occurrence of a given set of events. At the heart of CR is realism about ontology, an inquiry into the nature of things. Ontological realism asserts that much of reality exists and operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it. Reality does not wholly answer to empirical surveying or hermeneutical examination. Historically, social science, rightly seeking to ground itself in empirical investigations, has paid attention to epistemology at the expense of ontology, that is to say, sociology has focused on how we know what we know, while questions about the nature of the known are largely treated as an afterthought. As a researcher, I am part of the social contexts I study and cannot step outside the phenomenon of social justice, nor my place in history. This amplifies that I am not neutral to social justice, and need to abandon the cloak of objectivity (Hamby, 2018). The influence of my social positionality, gives me unique insights and contributes to my scholarly work. Engaging in the HE context, I attempt to apply the critical realist and social realist theories within the broader CR theory paradigm, advocating for social justice in HE.

Dr Mariette Fourie

"... it opens up novel opportunities to investigate complex phenomena such as social justice ..."



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Books

- Dennett, D.C. & Caruso, G.D. (2021). Just deserts: Debating free will. Polity Press.
- Gelman, A., Hill, J., & Vehtari, A. (2021). Regression and other stories. Cambridge University Press.
- Goldin, I. & Muggah, R. (2020). Terra Incognita: 100 maps to survive the next 100 years. Century.
- Grant, A. (2021). Think again: The power of knowing what you don't know. Penguin Books.
- Lee, M.T., Kubzensky, L.D., & VanderWeele, T.J. (2021). Measuring well-being: Interdisciplinary perspectives from the social sciences and the humanities. Oxford University Press.
- Tokuhama-Espinosa, T. (2018). Neuromyths: Debunking false ideas about the brain. W.W. Norton & Company.

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