**Summary of Akumal 2**

**Participant List**

Lisa Aspinwall, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Maryland, Department of Psychology

Melissa Brotman, Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania

Dov Cohen, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Waterloo

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Ph.D., Professor, Claremont Graduate School

Randy Ernst, Teacher, Lincoln High School.

Daniel Gilbert , Ph.D., Professor, Department of Psychology, Harvard University

Jonathan Haidt, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia

Derek M. Isaacowitz, M.A., Doctoral Student, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania

Alice M. Isen, Ph.D., Johnson Professor, Johnson Graduate School of Management, and Professor, Department of Psychology, Cornell University

Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley

Laura A. King, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Southern Methodist University

Darrin R. Lehman, Ph.D., Professor, Chair, Social-Personality Area, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia

Shane J. Lopes, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Psychology and Research in Education, University of Kansas

Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of California, Riverside

Sandra L. Murray, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, State University of New York, Buffalo

David G. Myers, Ph.D., John Dirk Werkman Professor of Psychology, Hope College

Mary Pipher, Ph.D.

Jonathan Schooler, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Pittsburgh

Barry Schwartz, Ph.D., Dorwin Cartwright Professor of Social Theory and Social Action, Psychology Department, Swarthmore College

David Seligman, Assistant Director of Research, Access Measurement Systems

Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D., Fox Leadership Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania

Kennon M. Sheldon, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Missouri-Columbia

Amy Wrzesniewski, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Management and Organizational Behavior, Stern School of Business, New York University

## Opening Remarks and Discussion

The meeting started Monday morning with a round of introductions. Dr. Seligman discussed how the Enlightenment was named by a group calling itself“ lumieres”. He then reported on a meeting he had recently with a group of lawyers, in which he suggested that law is too much about zero-sum games. The lawyers did not respond well to this suggestion, claiming that law is about argument and is not tied to any value system. Conversations such as this one are important when considering whether there is an “affirmation” of positive values that may currently be occurring across disciplines.

## Dr. Martin Seligman on “The Millennial Issue of the New York Times”

Dr. Seligman moved on to his opening comments, describing the Millennial Issue of the New York Times. The issue voiced a tremendous optimism about the role of technology in the future, but left out any mention of psychology. The group discussed this point: Dr. Schwartz argued that this was a blessing because it allowed psychology to work out of the public eye, while Dr. Pipher reported that people are really thirsty for the a positive psychology approach. Dr. Keyes suggested that psychologists need to collaborate, not only with each other, but with other disciplines in order to receive more recognition. He continued by expressing his concern of psychologists not being involved in Microsoft’s Electronic House. Dr. Lehman asked why we should be disappointed that the New York Times left psychology out; he argued that they left out numerous other disciplines and it would have been remarkable if positive psychology had been included.

Dr. Seligman then reported on developments since Akumal I: a positive psychology network (with Ed Diener chairing the Center for Positive Subjective Experience, Mike Csikszentmihalyi chairing the Center for Positive Traits, Kathleen Jamison chairing the Center for Positive Institutions, and Robert Nozick leading the study of the interrelationships of the three domains), a group working on the teaching of positive psychology, two special editions of the American Psychologist, and funds available to prime the pump and get research started. Dr. Seligman also discussed Good Morning America’s special two-hour edition on Positive Psychology aired earlier this fall. This special on Positive Psychology swept the ratings and Diane Sawyer has again contacted Dr. Seligman for more ideas. Dr. Seligman continued by discussing the positive response he received a couple of weeks ago giving a talk on Positive Psychology at NIH.

A discussion then ensued about the historical reasons for a focus on the negative. Dr. Haidt reported on Dale Miller’s finding that people become more selfish if told that others are acting out of self-interest. The group then discussed concerns about positive psychology having an implicit negative message and potentially ignoring those people at the bottom of the distribution of well-being.

## Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky on “Is Happiness Learnable?”

Dr. Lyubomirsky presented on why some people are so much happier than others. Environmental effects on happiness, which appear to be small, must happen through multiple cognitive and motivational processes. Happiness may be learnable, but genetic dispositions and set ranges must be taken into account, as well as a person’s desire to become happy.

In response to her presentation, Dr. Seligman introduced Lykken’s argument that people can break gene-environment covariation by defying their genetic steersman. Dr. Gilbert then started a discussion as to why we should learn to be happy when it can be induced chemically. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi answered that emotions serve an important signal function, and Dr. Schwartz commented that some people want most to be happy, but others desire to be right.

## Dr. Dacher Keltner on “Teasing and Laughter”

Dr. Keltner presented on teasing and laughter. Teasing appears to serve several important functions, including socializing people into the ways of a group, and making people closer to each other. Laughing also seems to serve important functions: in one study of recently bereaved spouses, those who laughed during interviews shortly after the death showed more positive relationships 2 and 4 years later. Girls who had suffered sexual abuse also seemed to show benefits from the potentially transformative effects of laughter. Dr. Keltner also explained that there appears to be no gender differences in teasing. In response to his presentation, Dr. Schwartz mentioned that there is a subset of teasing that is sarcasm.

## Dr. Alice Isen on “Be of Good Cheer: Positive Affect Facilitates Problem Solving”

That afternoon, Dr. Isen presented her research on the effects of positive emotions. The emphasis of the talk was on everyday positive emotions that can be induced by something as minor as giving a research participant a bag of candy. Positive affect appears to make people more flexible, and facilitates performance on tasks that require creativity and flexible thought. In fact, any careful complex problem-solving task is facilitated by positive affect. Positive affect does not impair or facilitate performance on routine tasks, suggesting that these effects are not solely due to activation. Dr. Isen suggested that most people have positive association networks that are activated by positive affect. She speculated that this might not be true for depressed individuals, although it is not known for sure at this time. Dr. Isen, among numerous other projects, is examining the impact of positive affect on prisoners’ dilemma games. Dr. Lehman mentioned the importance of conducting fMRI studies in this research area in the future.

Dr. Seligman commented that positive affect may not be totally fungible across different activities and Dr. Lyubomirsky asked how we should use the findings. In response to these issues raised, Dr. Isen explained that teachers can foster creativity by making the classroom a more positive place; similarly, managers may be able to affect workers by changing the affective tone in the company. Dr. Seligman followed-up by asking what can we do in our own lives? Dr. Isen suggested that if we should build in visible steps (or sub-goals) towards our goals in life; success experiences achieved on sub-goals may help people achieve larger goals. Dr. Isen concluded by discussing the role of dopamine and the frontal lobe in positive affect.

## Dr. Mary Pipher on “Families, Shelter, and Stories”

Tuesday morning, Dr. Pipher led a discussion on the beach about home, safety and family. Families can drive people sane, and outdated family therapy theories have tended to remove children from families rather than bring them closer. In this age of computer time, over 50% of families do not have one meal together during a week. However, when adults recall happy memories from their childhood, the ones they mention most often are family meals, family vacations, and time outdoors. Solutions include intentionally protecting one’s family and having some sort of value system.

**Dr. Daniel Gilber on “Mispredicting Happiness”**

Dr. Gilbert reported on evidence suggesting that people drastically overpredict the duration of their affective responses to events, especially negative events. People appear to have a psychological immune system but seem to lack awareness of this shield of resilience, leading them to ignore opportunities for rationalization and reframing. People should seek out situations that will be flexible and reframable according to this conceptualization.

Several participants raised ideas about his presentation: Dr. Aspinwall commented that immune systems learn from experience, so mispredicting affective responses should only be true for one-time problems. Dr. Lyubomirsky discussed Laura Carstensen’s work showing that people do learn about their own emotional resilience and resources as they age. Dr. Keltner reported that the immune neglect findings are consistent with other emotion research: namely, that physiological emotional responses are brief, but people think they are long-lasting.

**Dr. Barry Schwartz on “Freedom of Choice”**

Dr. Schwartz presented next, on the problem of choice. While increased choices may lead to more autonomy, it can also engender paralysis. With many options, people may try to optimize rather than satisfice, and this can lead to an information problem. Language, with its relative freedom within rigid constraints, may provide a better model for well-being. In current American culture, there are so many opportunities that failure becomes inexcusable; this may play a role in the current epidemic of depression. Commitment is undermined with so many choices. After his presentation, Dr. Pipher reported that may of the refugee adolescents she interviewed wanted their parents to arrange their marriages, because they needed something to believe in. Dr. Lehman raised the point that there are cultures that do not value self-choice as much as in the West.

## Dr. Darrin Lehman on “A Variety of Thoughts”

Dr. Lehman presented a variety of thoughts in an interactive group format on the topic of positive psychology. Dr. Seligman reiterated his hope nonzero-sum games are moderated by positive affect, while negative affect moderates zero-sum games. Dr. Isen commented that arousal increases use of the dominant behavior, and Dr. Aspinwall mentioned that negative emotional states give people interest in processing information, but may sometimes short circuit the actual processing. In contrast, positive affect fosters careful, analytic thinking. According to Dr. Isen, a negative situation does not imply negative affect; in fact, people in positive affect face negative situations better.

## Dr. Laura King on “Goals and Purpose”

In one of two parallel sessions, Dr. King discussed goals and purpose, primarily in the context of research she has done recently using a Pennebaker task in which participants write daily on a topic. In Pennebaker’s work, participants write about a traumatic event, and seem to experience health benefits from doing so. Dr. King found the same benefits from having participants write about positive aspects of traumatic events or about their best possible future selves. One reason this may work is that writing about a topic makes the topic part of the writer’s identity; the Pennebaker effect may just result from engaged writing on personally meaningful topics rather than from any particular content area. Dr. Lehman raised the possibility that the writing exercise prompted an important social process, for those participants who had such avenues open to them.

## Dr. Amy Wrzesniewski on “Finding Deeper Meaning in Work”

Dr. Wrzesniewski discussed finding deeper meaning in work. She distinguished the construct of a job, a career, and a following. While jobs are perceived of a means toward financial rewards and careers are pursued for advancement in status, a following is an ends in itself. She then presented several studies from her lab. The first found that people in the same job can possess different orientations toward their profession. Moreover, she found that work orientations are relatively stable over time, even if there is a change in careers. In another study, she examined how hospital cleaners experience their work. Two groups emerged. Those who completed the absolute minimum number of tasks often saw their work as unskilled. In contrast, the other group found their job as very important and viewed their job as healing the patients, rather than merely cleaning. Dr. Wrzesniewski then expressed her concerns in drawing public attention to her research on the way people view and execute their jobs. Those who are “going above and beyond” the boundaries of their job may be told to stop. Or, in contrast, those who are not doing the extra tasks may be told that such tasks are now required.

When the discussion opened up to the group, Dr. Haidt asked who are those who perceive their jobs as followings. In response, Dr. Wrzesniewski explained that there were no trait differences; there were no gender or race differences. Dr. Wrzesniewski concluded by saying that the next step of her research could be to examine potential interventions.

## Dr. Ken Sheldon on “Integrity”

Dr. Sheldon discussed integrity, and what it means to be true to one’s self. In his research, he evaluates why people pursue the goals they pursue, as well as which goals they actually choose to pursue (the content of the goals). Well-being is the standard outcome measure. Attaining any goal seems to predict increases in well-being over time, but there also appears to be an important moderator relationship: the more that goals are pursued for the right reasons, and the more that intrinsic goals (such as intimacy, connection, generativity) that are pursued, the greater the increase in well-being over time. Among South Korean students, increased well-being was related to increased ownership of goals as well.

After the presentation, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi reminded the group that philanthropists do such work because they have been taught that certain values are non-negotiable. Dr. Schwartz responded that integrity implies inalienability of goals. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi reported evidence that adolescents show the best outcomes if their goal is to make parents happy, and that Asian-American parents give their children non-negotiable goals and then leave them alone, whereas Caucasian American parents let their children decide on their own goals, but then micromanage. Dr. Pipher then contrasted teenage girls, who think that they have created their own selves, with older people who are much more humble about their self-creation. Additionally, older people who had done heroic acts often said they had no choice, furthering the notion that inalienability is a critical component of integrity.

## Dr. Shane Lopez on “Courage”

Dr. Lopez discussed courage and asked for feedback from the group to help him operationalize the construct. He explained that the concept can be examined from three bodies of literature: philosophy (Greek and Modern Day), Psychology (Jack Rachman), and Nursing. Dr. Lopez also wanted to distinguish courageous acts from courage. Dr. Seligman suggested that there may be thoughts involved in what appears to be acts that are automatic and he drew a parallel to automatic thoughts as defined in cognitive psychology. Dr. Seligman also questioned the existence of intellectual courage, such as Galileo. Dr. Lopez asked the group if they though courage was an emotional or cognitive process, and if they thought it could be taught. Dr. King suggested that he create a taxonomy of courage. Dr. Haidt said that creating a taxonomy could begin by collecting stories.

## Dr. Dove Cohen on “How to make institutions into Positive Communities”

Later that evening, Dr. Cohen discussed how to make institutions into positive communities. He first warned against unintending effects of attempting to change institutions, such as gun buyback programs that have in reality become gun upgrading programs. He discussed his research examining the structural and cultural factors of honor. He presented his findings showing more approval toward honor related violence in those from the south, compared to northerners. He continued by discussing the main mechanism propitiating these values; namely, families.

The discussion then opened up to the group. Dr. Lehman pointed out the strong potential effect of peer pressure. Dr. Haidt asked how can communities become more positive; what is the intervention? Dr. Csikszentmihalyi questioned the relationship between honor culture and collectivism.

## Dr. Sandra Murray on “Love and Illusion”

Thursday morning Dr. Murray discussed love and illusion. Satisfied partners give a positive spin on information and evidence to see their partner in the best possible light. In general, those who are satisfied see qualities in their partners that the partners do not see in themselves. Moreover, those who are satisfied see virtues in their partner that are not obvious to others, such as friends. Over time those who are idealized the most are together longer and are happier. It appears as though positive illusions buffer against negativity. Dr. Murray contends that these positive illusions are not based on denial. The positive illusions can be maintained due to complex thinking, i.e. finding the good in what maybe perceived as bad.

In response to her presentation, Dr. Lehman asked what happens when the gap between the perceived and the actual is very large, while Dr. Lyubomirsky compared this phenomenon to other relationships, such as mentor-student relationships. Dr. Murray added that such effects might also be applied to parent-child relationships.

**Drs. David Myers and Chuck Harper on “Agape Love”**

Drs. Myers and Harper then spoke on Agape Love. Dr. Myers discussed how post-1960s America has been a place of great progress and affluence, but also has witnessed (until recently) declining indicators of social health. Because of these trends, forces should be shifted away from radical individualism towards understanding the social ecological forces behind these trends and developing a social environmental movement in which human rights are respected and character is fostered. Dr. Harper then discussed the Templeton Foundation’s three areas of activity: science and religion, character building, and the pedagogy of freedom. The group then discussed the Templeton Foundation’s interest in research on agape love, or unlimited, pure, altruistic love; namely, the act of giving without expecting anything in return. They also discussed Dr. Haidt’s suggestion that a mechanism of fast funding for junior faculty interested in this area would be very helpful in facilitating research projects.

## Dr. Jon Haidt on “Awe and Elevation”

Dr. Haidt presented his research on awe and elevation. He presented several studies examining elevation in children and adults, in several cultures, and he proposed that elevation has three key features: it is triggered by manifestations of moral beauty or virtue; it involves a physical response, including a warm, glowing feeling in the chest, and feelings of chills or tingling, and sometimes a tightening in the throat; and it involves motivation changes that make people more open to others, and more altruistic. He suggested that elevation may be useful in moral education.

Dr. Isen asked Dr. Haidt to differentiate elevation from positive affect. Dr. Haidt responded that elevation is a form of positive affect, but is more specific, involving physical feelings in the chest, and a specific desire to help other people, which are not usually found with other forms of positive affect. Dr. Haidt also explained that there appears to be a distinctive biological component, perhaps involving the vagus nerve, which innervates all the bodily organs that are affected by elevation experiences.

## Dr. Mike Csikszentmihalyi on “What is the Good Life?”

Dr. Csikszentmihalyi spoke that evening on: “what is the good life?” He suggested that the examination must rely on a longitudinal approach. He proposed three main ideas to the group. First, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi questioned the unit of measurement for the good life. He continued by discussing the old philosophical view of the good life and explained that early philosophers said no man should call himself happy until the end. In other words, these philosophical views suggested a retrospective analysis. From a religious perspective, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi presented that concept of an afterlife, explaining that from this perspective, as long as one benefits from suffering a good life can be proclaimed. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi then posed the question as to who this “good life” is good for? Three answers arose: the individual, the family, or for God. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi then presented his research involving paging children in grades 6, 8. 10, and 12 using the Experience Sampling Method. These participants were studied every 2 years. Social class and parental education predicted parental engagement in children’s lives curvilinearly, and children who experienced flow appeared to have better outcomes than those who did not. Also, pain in girls was predicted by high challenge situation combined with low skills at earlier testing occasions, while pain in boys arose from earlier low challenge, low skill situations. The group then discussed children who beat the odds, who appeared to find ways to commit themselves to something large enough to get them through difficult times.

## The Future of Positive Psychology

Friday morning, the group discussed the future of positive psychology. On the topic of Akumal III, the group decided to invite pods of several people who study a common positive psychology topic rather than just to invite individuals. Approximately 8 topic pods will be invited; they will have a lot of time to discuss and plan projects among themselves, but will also have opportunities to present to the larger group. In terms of teaching, Dr. Myers suggesting that the group consider the approach of APA Division 35 (Women), who sent a manual to all textbook authors discussing ways to include gender issues in their text, with great success. Dr. Seligman asked the group whether an Intro Psychology book with a positive focus might be tenable. A request was made to the group to remember the importance of reaching high school students, as nearly one million secondary students take Introductory Psychology annually. Members of the group also discussed getting scientifically based positive psychology books on the Self-Help shelf in bookstores. The group also discussed the importance of communicating with the media, and members volunteered to be media contacts.