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## NEW PBS DOCUMENTARY, *THIS EMOTIONAL LIFE*, EXAMINES WHETHER AMERICANS CAN BE HAPPIER

### Vulcan Productions, NOVA/WGBH Team Up With Harvard Author to Provide the Keys to Leading Richer Lives

December 1, 2009 – On the eve of a new year, as millions of Americans struggle to find more meaning in their lives, Vulcan Productions and NOVA/WGBH have teamed up with Harvard psychologist and best-selling author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, Professor Daniel Gilbert, to produce *This Emotional Life*. This three-part documentary premieres on PBS January 4-6, 2010 (at 9:00 p.m. check local listings) and examines why people find happiness to be such an elusive goal.

*This Emotional Life*, a co-production of Vulcan Productions and the NOVA/WGBH Science Unit, unfolds across three, two-hour episodes, exploring the nature of the social relationships that are the key to our human happiness (Family, Friends & Lovers); the obstacles to happiness, negative emotions, which we can't live with and can't live without (Facing Our Fears); and the sometimes misguided pursuit of happiness itself (Rethinking Happiness). The programs are produced by Kunhardt McGee Productions. Each episode weaves together the compelling personal stories of ordinary people and the latest in brain science research, along with revealing comments from celebrities such as Chevy Chase, Larry David, Elizabeth Gilbert, Alanis Morissette, Katie Couric and Richard Gere.

Professor Gilbert, whose research examines why people so often mispredict what will make them happy, says, "Science has revealed three important facts about happiness: You can't be happy alone; you can't be happy all the time; you can be happier than you are. Our three shows examine each of these three facts."

"*This Emotional Life* represents what television does best — it opens a window into real lives. People shared their personal stories, honestly and openly," said Senior Executive Producer Richard Hutton of Vulcan Productions. "The results are dramatic. You'll see first-hand how people, both ordinary and extraordinary, cope with challenges as they struggle to achieve greater happiness and fulfillment."

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*"This Emotional Life* is about human connections and understanding how our social interactions are deeply wired in our brains," said Paula Apsell, Senior Executive Producer, NOVA/WGBH Science Unit and co-producer. "The series looks at the latest, cutting-edge biological and social science behind our human nature to help us better understand what drives our emotions and what can lead us to happiness."

The three episodes trace our relationships and what science reveals about them beginning with our very first one, the parent-child relationship, and how our connections to others impact our happiness. Below are descriptions of *This Emotional Life's* three episodes:

### **Episode 1: Family, Friends & Lovers (January 4)**

The first episode looks at the importance of relationships and why they are central to our emotional well-being. What are the cognitive and neurological processes underpinning our everyday interactions, and can they help us to understand why some relationships flourish and others fail? We meet a young boy adopted from a Russian orphanage, whose story illustrates how a lack of attachment in infancy fundamentally shapes his ability to build relationships for years to come. We meet the young parents of newborn twins; a couple in therapy for a troubled marriage; a teenager who was bullied with tragic consequences; two women grappling with the stress of workplace conflicts; and other characters — all to better understand the importance of social connections and relationships.

### **Episode 2: Facing Our Fears (January 5)**

In the second episode, we look at emotions that are commonly regarded as obstacles to happiness — such as anger, fear, anxiety and despair. Why do we have these emotions and how can we best manage them? Our brains are designed for survival, and the negative emotions they create are vital to that mission. But those negative emotions can spiral out of control with debilitating effects. We meet a woman whose inability to control her temper is jeopardizing her relationships; a college student whose fear of flying is limiting her life; and a teenager on the eve of attending college who is struggling to overcome clinical depression. We also meet veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and follow their journeys to find effective treatment. Across the episode, science reminds us that we are of two minds — a rational brain that's relatively new and an emotional brain that's older than time. Sometimes, emotion overwhelms reason, sometimes reason outwits emotion, and it is the endless struggle that makes our lives so painful, so joyous and so interesting.

### **Episode 3: Rethinking Happiness (January 6)**

Finally, the last episode explores happiness. It is so critical to our well-being and, yet, it remains such an elusive goal for many of us. What is it, why is it important and how can we attain more of it? We meet individuals facing major turning points in their lives — a job loss, a cancer diagnosis, the death of a child, an accident — as well as those facing more common struggles. We learn from the latest research that we often incorrectly predict what will bring us greater happiness, leading us to look for it in the wrong places. As the study of behavior turns more toward positive emotions, we explore the latest research on the activities and

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qualities that foster them, such as meditation, compassion, forgiveness and altruism. We also share the remarkable stories of resilient individuals whom scientists are studying in order to learn more about us all, including a man who overcame an abusive childhood to become a renowned surgeon and a Vietnam veteran who survived torture, solitary confinement and seven years as a POW, yet emerged emotionally unscathed. Understanding why some people have the ability to bounce back after disaster strikes, while others do not, sheds light on how all of us can lead happier, more fulfilling lives. The film ends by coming full circle to the understanding that it is the quality of our relationships — with friends, family and the larger community — that ultimately defines our happiness.

The film is complemented by a content-rich Web site, [www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife](http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife). It provides vetted resources and opportunities to build social support networks around topics highlighted in the series, such as the importance of early attachment, how to heal strained or damaged relationships, PTSD, stress, depression, grief, resilience and our pursuit of happiness.

The Web site is the centerpiece of a nationwide outreach campaign, extending the reach of the project beyond the broadcast. The effort provides people with valuable information, offers access to mechanisms for social support and helps mitigate the stigma attached to mental illness.

As part of the research conducted in the making of the documentary, Vulcan Productions identified two areas that deserved deeper attention. As a result, Vulcan is developing two toolkits: one on early attachment for parents of infants and a second on the process of deployment for military service members and their families, before, during and after their tours of duty.

The Early Childhood Attachment Toolkit will focus on how parents and caregivers can develop strong attachments with their children, which are the keys to social and emotional development. The Family Guide to Military Deployment will provide tangible resources to some of the 1.8 million servicemen and women who have been deployed and give them and their families usable tools and information to help during all phases of deployment.

Leading medical, health sciences and service organizations from around the country recognize the importance and potential impact of this multi-faceted project and are assisting in developing content. They will also be taking part in events and distributing materials and resources. Partners and contributors include the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); Blue Star Families; the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance; Mental Health America; Mayo Clinic; and the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

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## About the Project Partners:

**Vulcan Productions** is the independent film production company founded by investor and philanthropist Paul G. Allen in 1997. Vulcan Productions devotes itself exclusively to producing independent films of unique vision and artistic quality. Through its collaborative partnerships with established and emerging filmmakers, Vulcan Productions explores creative opportunities that result in engaging and inspirational story telling. [www.vulcanproductions.com](http://www.vulcanproductions.com)

**NOVA/WGBH Science Unit** WGBH Boston is America's preeminent public broadcasting producer, the source of fully one-third of PBS' prime-time lineup, along with some of public television's best-known lifestyle and children's programs and many public radio favorites. One of its premiere programs, NOVA, is a production of the NOVA/WGBH Science Unit. Now in its 36th year of broadcasting, NOVA is the most popular science series on American television and is seen in more than 100 countries. It is also one of television's most acclaimed series, having won every major television award, most of them many times over. [www.wgbh.org/](http://www.wgbh.org/) and [pbs.org/nova](http://pbs.org/nova)

**Kunhardt McGee Productions** (formally Kunhardt Productions) was founded in 1987 by Peter W. Kunhardt, a veteran of ABC News and the winner of three national Emmy Awards. Dyllan McGee, Kunhardt's longtime colleague, became a partner in the company in 2008. The company specializes in multi-platform documentary programming crafted to bring cutting-edge scholarship to popular audiences. [www.kunhardtmcgee.com](http://www.kunhardtmcgee.com)

**Method** is a brand experience agency that helps organizations and businesses harness the competitive power of design. With deep expertise in research, strategy, design and technology, Method offers a rigorous, intelligent approach to solving complex brand problems in the physical and digital realms. [www.method.com](http://www.method.com)

**Cause & Affect** is an innovative agency operating at the nexus of media and social change, with the objective of creating meaningful public engagement on a wide variety of issues. Led by Meredith Blake, the architect of the social action campaign accompanying Al Gore's Academy Award-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Cause & Affect brings widespread attention to causes by partnering with influential individuals or organizations that possess considerable resources, visibility and credibility. [www.causeaffect.com](http://www.causeaffect.com)

**Mission Measurement** helps nonprofits, foundations and corporations measure and improve their social impact through strategy and measurement consulting, training and data services. As the result of their work, organizations have been able to improve the effective delivery of their services, increase the visibility of their work, achieve financial sustainability and communicate results to key stakeholders. [www.missionmeasurement.com](http://www.missionmeasurement.com)

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